GANDLE
FOLLOWS
HIS NOSE
HEYWOOD
BROUN

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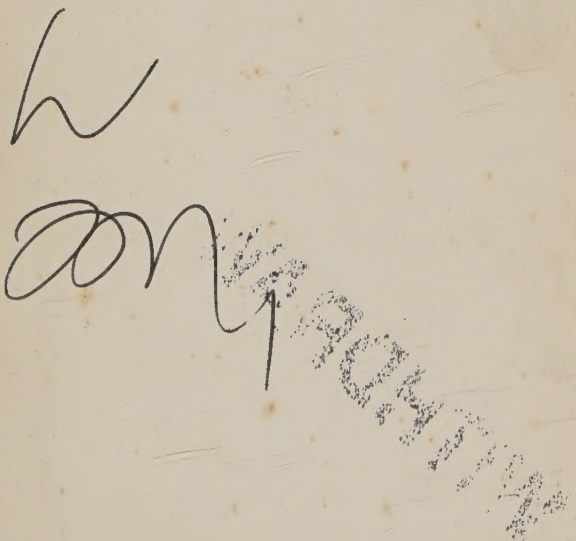

GANDLE FOLLOWS HIS NOSE

BY

HEYWOOD BROUN

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To
MARGARET SCOTT OLIVER

Gandle Follows His Nose

CHAPTER ONE

In the beginning Gandle was alone.

"Let me look," said his mother when they told her she had borne a boy, strong and beautiful. And then, as they held the child up to her eyes, she died.

Nobody can remember who first called him Bunny. That name he seems almost to have brought with him into the world. It was coined out of his skin, white as a rabbit, and there was a twitch to his nose and his eyes swept right and left. But his shock of hair was black as a dragon's belly.

It is not likely that his uncle was the

first to name him Bunny Gandle. He used few words and none out of fancy. In the long valley no other was so silent. He had the quiet, but not the glint of dark nights. His hut lay lonely and close to the hill of dragons and until he took the child there must have been months in which no man or woman came through the door. After dark, and it was a fast and early dark, fire was never kindled in that house. Lamplight would have brought moths and dragons.

Night was the first terror Bunny Gandle knew. He woke as trees crunched and wondered whether this might be the wind or any other beast. In the morning if trees were down it was difficult to tell the path of storms from that of dragons. Both were fierce and aimless in their malice. Still, in these days fear was a simple thing. Sheep ran from Gandle. He ran from dragons.

But these same sheep minded the dragons not at all. That was a complication. Gandle never learned that this immunity could be explained by the fact that wool was most unpleasant to a dragon's tongue. His uncle told him all woodsmen kept sheep for safety. And this house had a dog as well. He might have been eaten readily enough, but in times of danger he barked, which brought the sheep out and sent the dragons scurrying. The best feature of the blockade lay in its peculiar efficacy against hungry dragons. In that condition the dragon grows particularly panicky, for he fears that if he lingers he may be tempted to take a sheep, wool and all.

Early in life Gandle devised a game which gave him great pleasure. It was his practice whenever the sheep saved his life to come close and punch them both in

the nose. This served to make a man of him.

At eighteen Gandle stood as high as his uncle and broader across his square boxed shoulders. His learning was not much beyond the knowledge of night and day, heat and cold. And he knew that the small fish he caught from the lake fought hard to keep away from death. Fish and moths and flies; only these had died before the eyes of Gandle. Of Hell and Heaven he knew nothing and no one mentioned God.

It was on the morning of his eighteenth birthday that Gandle was taken to the consulting room of the sorcerer. This had been the plan from far back before Gandle was born. It was the same sorcerer who had befriended his father and armed him with charms when he went up into the hill of the dragons. And there he died of a dragon, but the reputation of the sorcerer

did not suffer. In magic there must always be a margin of error.

Everyone in the village knew that Baoz belonged among the twelve best wizards. Offers came to him from distant lands and great cities. Once it was said that King Helgas had sent for him. But Baoz remained at home. He was content with the meager opportunities of magic which came to him in a community of scarcely more than a thousand. Even so small a number made many and various demands. Still, something of specialization was forced upon him and he dealt chiefly in magic caps and love potions. Whoever wore a cap was invisible. Whoever drank the magic draught was infatuated. Practically everyone for miles around had married under the urge of the love philtres of Baoz and talk was that his skill was greater with caps. People said that after years the tang of the bitter and

powerful broth would dissipate. It was not unknown for a man or woman, twenty years wed, to wake one morning and to say, "Why on earth did I ever do it?" And by then it was too late for Baoz. He could create love but he had no tonic strong enough to recreate it.

But for the caps there seemed to be no special span of time. It was strange on a Summer's night to pass through the village street and out into open meadow country, hearing on all sides murmurs, sighs, snatches of talk, and sounds of scuffling and yet see no one. On festival days the population dwindled. Even the respectable put on, for the evening, invisibility.

And so, concerning the caps, there was some complaint by old people. But it was a young woman, and a bitter one, who said that Baoz ought to fashion some of his cloth into baby caps for bastards. There

was illegitimacy in the community and indeed when a girl was questioned as to the name of the father of her child no one thought it shameful if she replied, "I have no idea. He came to me soft spoken and invisible."

But Gandle had no cap nor had he heard of Baoz until the morning his uncle took him to the wizard's door. And even then there was no explanation or introduction. Just a push in the back and Bunny Gandle, alone, stood in the magic room.

CHAPTER TWO

At first he blinked and could not see, for the room was filled with purple vapor and a pungence not known in the forest. Presently he detected something white moving in the mist. It went and returned and went again. There was a rhythm, but no wind or any sound. Gandle came closer to find out about this and saw that it was a skeleton. And even so he could not account for its uneasiness. As he peered up and down to learn, if he might, why the thing would not rest there came a voice from across the room. "Your name is Bunny Gandle," said the voice and that, too, was remarkable. First there was only a voice and a second later a fat man in a purple gown appeared from nowhere.

Baoz was a little chagrined because Gandle showed no surprise at this feat of magic, but how could Gandle recognize it as magic? For all he knew this might be the custom of the town. And in the forest things were not so very different. Gandle had seen a deer vanish and reappear out of a swamp almost as quickly. Those who spend a childhood close to dragons seldom swoon in later life.

Next Baoz took three slivers, cut from carrots, and dropped them into a bowl of water where instantly they became goldfish. From this trick Gandle derived an erroneous conception of biology. He had long wondered by just what process the small perch in the lake behind his uncle's house came into being. Now he remembered having seen the old man peel an orange along that shore.

But after that Baoz did lay hold upon the mind of Gandle and made him shudder

in surprise. He motioned to the boy to come close to a great crystal ball on a table in the center of the room. They huddled and bent over it and in the glass Gandle saw himself trudging a long road. Undeniably it was Gandle and in the crystal the trees and the hills swept past as he walked. Presently, he stood still at a fork in the road. To the right and to the left ran highways of equal promise.

"Now," said Baoz, "pay strict attention and you shall see what my magic can mean to you."

The tiny toy doll of a Gandle turned down the road at the left and before he had gone a little way there came a man to meet him, a man in steel with a sword blinking in the sun. There was talk between the two and up flashed the sword and fell upon the shoulder of the dream Gandle. Red spurted out till the whole circle of the crystal was crimson. And

Gandle grew faint and swayed, for this was his own blood. Baoz waved his hand and the picture faded. There was nothing now but the reflection of the white skeleton which kept up its rounds behind them.

"So," said Baoz. "There is such a crossroads. You will come to it. I have let you see the evil of the wrong road. Maybe you felt the pain in your shoulder as the sword fell."

And, as he spoke, he put his hand on Gandle's shoulder. It was a soft, fat hand which grew heavier. And there was a chill from it and again Gandle swayed as if he felt the bite of metal. Before, it had been a single, sharp stroke, but the hard and crushing hand of the sorcerer continued to cut so that he would have jerked himself free if these fingers had not now become iron.

"The right road is the good road," con-

tinued Baoz. "There your fortune lies and no ill adventure."

Gandle was born again into the life of the crystal. He saw himself walking a long, straight road with none to oppose him, but he fancied that the figure moving through the dust swung shoulders not so free as the other Gandle who had chosen to turn left. It was almost as if the fingers under which he himself sagged rested upon the back of the little Gandle imprisoned within the glass. He felt that this time the traveler was not alone, though he seemed solitary. Baoz took from under the robe a cap of white cloth and with a quick movement set it upon his own head. There was no wizard. But his chuckle could be heard and the grip of his fingers did not relax. Gandle knew, then, that just such a one walked with him and leaned upon him in the journey along the road called good. Out of nothing popped

Baoz back again into the room, but Gandle was just as quick. The price of the safe road was too high. He wanted to free his small blood brother and he swung his right hand against the crystal so that it leaped from off the table. Like a puff ball it spattered. Smoke, which seemed the very dust of the conjured road, writhed high as the heel of the skeleton. But then the glass lay dead and in fragments.

One of the two Gandles was free. Danger menaced the other. Close and closer came the big, gray face of Baoz. The cold hand burned into the flesh of Gandle. With all his soul and shoulders he wrenched to get away and there was a might in his young back which brought him clear from the magic fingers. At this same moment he snatched for the white cap and won, for it was only in the right hand that Baoz was potent. Upon all his left side he was ancient. Gandle put on

the cap as the magician had done a minute before. He did not know whether or not he was invisible and anyway even such a state was insufficient meagerness to keep him safe from sorcery. The purple haze concealed from him the direction of the door and so he sought escape by going up. As the skeleton swung over head Gandle leaped and seized the shoulder-blades. His legs he drew after him and wrapped them round the skull. Weight made no difference in the pattern of this pendulum. Even though the heft of life was now upon it, the skeleton continued to swing unceasingly.

From the wall Baoz took down a curved sword and cut and thrust in every corner of the room. It swished too loud and swirled too fast to please the wizard, for he knew that even so sharp a sword could not slash, thus, through flesh and bone. If he could but reach Gandle with the

blade he could mar him sight unseen. And truly Gandle was close at hand. Now and again he might have reached down from the arc and touched the head of Baoz, but instead he clung all the closer to the skeleton. With a word and a gesture of the hand, the wizard caused a flame to sweep along the whole length of the floor, but it did not rise high enough to scorch Gandle. Still, he realized that even on the back of a skeleton he was not safe and now he saw the door. Part of the leap was his own and a little was from the momentum of his uneasy and bony benefactor. Upon his toes he made a landing and thrust both hands ahead of him against the door. It swung open. Gandle was loose in the world. With no more than a stumble he clicked into his stride. He ran. He ran as if all the dragons he had ever seen were chirping behind him. His heart battered his ribs and no air

came except a little which he bolted in agony. And farther he would have gone if he had not tripped and fallen into soft grass. There Gandle lay and fed upon the wind which came to his mouth.

His course had carried him to a hilltop and when he had strength enough to turn upon his side he saw, at a great distance, the house of Baoz. As he watched, there was a burst of flame and the house was gone. The wizard had blown it up by magic, hoping thus to kill Gandle. His old eyes had not seen the swing of the door as Gandle fled. Nor did Baoz have apparatus with which to find the fugitive. The crystal ball was not of his own making, but came from a city sorcerer who made such things in quantity. Gandle knew none of this and yet he felt quit of Baoz. Even dragons could kill only such as were within range of their claws. When his wind returned he whistled and

climbed down the hill to a fine, fair high-road. Evidently he was not invisible in the eye of a searching sun and his forehead chafed against the rough texture of the cap. Soon he took it off, for it seemed more friendly to move openly and to join in with so kindly a landscape.

And he came to a crossroads. This Gandle had seen before and he hesitated. The left was the road of danger and misfortune. Baoz had said that he should by all means take the right. Baoz was an unpleasant man and Gandle swung resolutely to the left. Evil it might be, but it was also the road upon which Baoz would not expect to find him if he took up the pursuit. But most of all Bunny Gandle turned left because this road was his own idea. He himself chose it. That made it his.

CHAPTER THREE

WHEN he had gone a little way there came a man to meet him and it was a man in steel whose sword blinked in the sun.

"I say to you," cried the man in steel, "that the Lady Agatha is the fairest and most wondrous lady in all the world."

Gandle said nothing.

The man in steel paused and waited for a reply.

"Have you no fair lady?" he asked contentiously.

Gandle puzzled a long time and then he answered politely, "Once my uncle told me that my mother was very beautiful."

"And what was her name?" said the man in steel.

"I don't know," replied Gandle.

The man drew his sword and raised it

above his head. "In that case," he shouted in a loud voice, "you're a bastard."

Gandle made no move.

The stranger lowered his sword. "I said," he repeated, "you're a bastard."

There was another pause.

"Look here," urged the man in steel, "you know that's a fighting word. Let's get started."

"Why?" asked Gandle.

"Damn your insolence," screamed the knight, and he lunged with his sword and cut Gandle in the shoulder.

The faintness came and the world grew red as the crystal had done. Gandle would have fallen and he felt the need of something to clutch to save himself. Because of the pain of his wound he began to whimper and there were tears in his eyes. Slowly the man in steel raised his sword again. He was deliberate, and before the blade could cut a second time

Gandle had leaped close to him. To keep from falling he seized the throat of his enemy and when his fingers were upon his neck he wanted to tear it. Somehow the wound did not hurt so much as Gandle pressed hard with his strong hands. In this soft flesh there were strings which fought and pounded against the fingers of Gandle and he beat them down with his power. But soon this stalwart one to whom Gandle had clung to keep erect swayed with him. It was again a course which he had traveled and he felt that once more he rode the skeleton. But this time the arc was less regular and the sweep down was longer than the up beat. Together they fell to the ground. Gandle loosed his hold. The man gasped, "I do not understand this. You are a coward. When I cut you, you cried like a child and now——"

"But it hurt me," said Gandle. "It still hurts me. Why shouldn't I cry?"

He got no answer to his question. The man in steel was dead.

Gandle was sorry and perplexed.

"There wasn't any sense to that," he thought. "Why did he want to fight me? I never said the Lady Agatha was not the fairest lady in all the world. What did he want my opinion for? I've never seen her. As long as he knew it what did he care how I thought about it?"

For awhile he rested and bled and then he took the sword of the dead man and went farther on that some road. His wound no longer pained much and he was eager, for this was the end of foreknowledge. Beyond this point the crystal had not carried him.

CHAPTER FOUR

Soon a dust cloud approached and Gandle's shoulder ached. As he feared, it was another man in armor and quarrelsome according to the tradition.

"I declare," shouted this one while still far off, "that in all the land there lives none so fair or virtuous as the Lady Phyllis."

Gandle was not minded to be tumbled into a fight through taciturnity as he had been before and when the new knight came close he cupped his hands and bellowed even louder than this other, "Agatha! Agatha! Agatha!" It seemed to him that this was more suitable than any mention of his mother, for at least he knew the name. Besides there lay dead upon the road one who had championed the lady

and something Gandle owed to him since he carried his sword. The man who approached stopped in his tracks five feet away.

"The Lady Agatha is my great-aunt," he said. "Where did you ever meet her?"

A fear which was new seized upon Gandle. Very much he did not want to admit that he had borrowed a name just as he had borrowed a sword. The necessity of explanation and confession gave him a giddiness even more disturbing and burning than a sword thrust. Somehow he must escape this ordeal of words.

"I think," said Gandle in a low, calm voice, "you are a bastard."

The dead man had spoken truly. It was a fighting word. As the stranger struck Gandle leaped back and the blow missed him by many feet. Gandle swung his own sword but he had drawn an agile opponent and the surplus of his effort almost

threw him to the ground as the knight slipped away from his intent. So it went with slash and swing and never any solid thing to check the force of the monster efforts. A noon sun beat down upon the combat and Gandle sweated and puffed. The business bored him and finally as he backed out of range he had time to adjust the magic cap. Quite evidently he became invisible, for he passed within a few feet of his opponent unharmed.

"Stand out and fight like a man," cried the perplexed adversary and he thrust and lunged at places which Gandle had quitted many minutes before. But Gandle kept on walking and it was not until he reached a bend in the road more than a quarter of a mile away that he turned to shout at the panting figure behind him, "Agatha! Agatha! Phyllis is a bastard and so are you."

He was very well pleased with himself

then and walked ahead without adventure until evening, when he rested under a tree. Upon the point of a long shadow he saw metal reddened by the lowering sun. He stooped and found a rusty lamp. With his hand he rubbed the dull surface.

It was an old tough rust against which Gandle rubbed. He did not see a black cloud rise from behind the mountain and take form as it drifted through the air. This was a miracle more slow and stupendous than any performed by Baoz. The cloud grew legs and arms. The mist was delivered of a genie. He whispered and Gandle leaped for fear of falling mountains. They did not move now nor had they for centuries, but it was possible to see that this huge, rough sketch of a man swayed as leaves sway. And Gandle regarded him with the close scrutiny of wonder. Again the genie spoke,

close-hauling his words out of their thunder.

"I am your slave. Command me," he said.

He was monstrous beyond any talking being in the world, but, after all, dragons are larger than lizards.

"He's pretty big," thought Gandle, and with that admission he managed to inquire calmly enough, "For what may I ask?"

"Ask," said the genie, "out of any and all your desires."

Gandle wrinkled his forehead and the first thing to pop into his mind was that he wanted a cup of water. It seemed silly to ask for that and so he thought a little longer. Then he remembered that soon he would sleep and he said, "I'd like a house.

"A large house," he added, for a little one might slip through the genie's fingers and be broken. There was on that instant

a palace. Gandle found that the tree at his back had become colder and more smooth. It was one of many marble columns. The high, white towers and the fountains were rather more than Gandle had expected. The genie had taken the liberty of expressing his own personality in executing the order, for he found that this saved time and mitigated the thrall of servitude.

And so the size and scope of it awed Gandle. It was an empty palace and lonely. In the cottage of his uncle was more security.

"I'd like a dog and two sheep," said Gandle quickly, thinking of approaching night and the possibility of dragons. There came a black dog, well proportioned to the white palace, but though large he was not fearsome as he fawned at the feet of Gandle. This dog lacked charm. A stick was thrown for him to chase and

he stood stock still until Gandle cried, "Fetch," whereupon he scurried off like a genie. He seemed rather to fly than leap across the meadow and dutifully he spat out the wood upon the knees of Gandle. Old yellow Juba back in the forest used to make a game of it and he would stop and scamper, growl, worry the wood, and bark hugely with each surrender. The dog of the lamp stood sedulous for orders and almost he clicked his heels like a guardsman on dress parade.

Then, too, the gray-green eyes were curious. Juba could stand a stare only for a fraction of time, but this one never took his eyes away from the gaze of Gandle. Strangest of all there was no hint of the chug-chug-chug customary from a dog who has come to rest after running. And the sheep who stood off a little way were also silent and respectful.

"What's his name?" asked Gandle,

somewhat embarrassed by the weight of fealty.

"He has none," said the genie, "until you speak."

"I had a dog named Juba, but that won't do for him. He's different."

The genie listened and made no suggestion.

"What's your name?" Gandle asked him.

"Yom, Master. It is a poor name," added the slave of the lamp venturing for the first time into opinion.

"It's all right. Would you mind if I called him Yom?"

The giant bent all but double in acknowledgment, and the dog licked Gandle's hand.

"What does he eat?"

"That which you provide him," answered Yom, the genie.

"I'd like bread."

The loaf seemed to be plucked out of the air, but it was substantial enough and the dog ate that part of it which was forced upon him, for he had no disposition to snatch any morsel out of the hands of his master. In dealing with Juba, Gandle had always felt relieved to get five fingers back. The mannerliness of Yom made the feeding tiresome.

"I suppose you've got to be getting home pretty soon," ventured the boy.

"I await commands."

Gandle thought of all that happened during the day and one slogan remained in his mind— "The fairest and most virtuous lady in all the world"— For that one man had fought under the hot sun and another had died.

"Bring me," said Gandle, "the fairest and most virtuous lady in all the world."

Nothing happened. An instant came and passed and all that Gandle had was

half a loaf, two sheep, a dog and a palace. He looked inquiringly and both Yoms cringed.

"You will have to tell me more," explained the genie.

"What more?"

"I don't know what woman would seem to you the fairest. And virtue! What is virtue? That hasn't been settled yet. At least not permanently. We genii only take orders. We decide nothing. Virtue! Oh, that's much too hard for me. Specifications would have to go with that. It's a difficult command."

As Yom finished speaking he snorted and two trees went down. Now it was Gandle who cringed.

"Don't bother about virtue, then," he said kindly.

This concession seemed to set the genie more at ease. He talked longer and louder and leaned against a mountain.

"I think you're wise," Yom rumbled. "Virtuous is a word. Words are hard to move. They're more slippery than palaces. Words aren't my business. I fetch and carry things."

Neither of them spoke for a time and both listened to the fountains spattering in the marble basins. Only a rind of day was left at the top of the mountain. Back of the palace, in the shadow of the wood, a bird sang. Gandle did not know if this were part of the genie's gift, lifted out of the sky, or a mere commonplace thrush belonging to the countryside before the magic came.

The genie broke the silence without a sign from Gandle.

"Nature is very wonderful," he remarked. "I've always said that."

Gandle agreed with him.

Down went the sun and the bird stopped,

but the fountains played on. The water notes were long and without shrillness. After every four beats one was skipped and each time the heart of Gandle hung upon that silence. He had seen this palace and its grounds leap out of nothing only a few minutes before and yet it seemed as if this water had always been droning and would go on as long.

Yom, the larger, sighed. It was not thunder.

"Once in Chaldea," he began, "a thousand years ago, maybe it was two thousand, I had a girl——"

By the merest chance Gandle yawned. He had fought two duels and walked ten miles.

"Your slave presumes," said the genie and became more practical. "Now about this girl for you—the fairest lady in all the world—you just mean fair for beauti-

ful, don't you. That doesn't necessarily refer to complexion?"

"I don't know. It's just another word. It might be difficult for you like virtuous."

"Not a bit of it," said Yom. "You make the choice. Shall she be fair or dark?"

"Which is best?" asked Gandle.

"That's not for a genie to say. Men haven't decided. But if I may be so bold —I judge by your question you're not what I should call experienced— If I do not offend, is this your first girl? Now my memory of my own life may deceive me. It's a long time back, but I'm pretty sure the first one ought to be fair. If I'm not wrong and this is your first."

"No," said Gandle, "from the top of a hill beside my uncle's cottage sometimes I could see girls in the town walking on the road. It was only a mile. One clear day I saw as many as ten."

"And they, these girls you saw from the hill, they were dark or fair?"

"That I could not tell."

"It seems to me," said Yom, "that in the sunlight all girls are fair."

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM the forest behind the palace came the sound of leaves making way for something which passed by. The dog of the lamp lay silent, but Gandle thought of dragons. At last he asked:

"Have you dragons hereabouts?"

"I suppose so," answered Yom. "There are always dragons in the country," and he slapped the fleshy part of his calf as if annoyed by reminiscence. It was not sleeplessness but death which Gandle dreaded. He could not endure the thought of dying alone in the big palace, having no company but that of a dull and tongue-tied dog. His uncle spoke seldom, but the sound of him moving about was friendly. The black hound promised not even the

comfort of clatter, stalking as he did upon a world napped with velvet.

The fairest lady in all the world was now again remembered.

"We were talking," he said, "about a girl who should stay here, too."

"Mold her," suggested Yom. "Does your fancy run to one tall or short and what is your preference in disposition? Just what is it you want?"

"Someone to talk to," replied Gandle. "You know just someone to be about until I fall asleep."

"But then you don't really want the fairest lady in all the world. Now this girl I had in Chaldea——"

Again Gandle yawned and this time he did it on purpose. The genie relapsed into silence so meekly that Gandle had a feeling he must assert himself. He found that he liked to assert himself particularly when the opportunity was made easy.

"She must be the fairest in all the land," he insisted. "Agatha was and Phyllis and I fought with the men who said so. One of them I killed. I was too strong for him. He had a sword and cut me and I killed him with my hands."

"My master is mighty," said Yom deferentially, but there was a rumble behind his hand as he put it before his mouth.

"And now," he said briskly, "night draws on and your slave must not delay your desires. But still you have not told me all that it is needful for me to know. If you will close your eyes and think hard and deep down into the pools it may be that you will remember things you do not know."

Gandle did as he was told and as the genie had come out of mist so did the likeness of the girl, even though his eyes were tightly shut. She stood as high as his shoulder. Black hair, black brows, white

skin and, though he had seen women only from the hilltop, the figure of the fair one was modeled by his thoughts in all the exactitude of curving breast and length of limb. So clear and complete was she that Gandle opened his eyes and in new moonlight there stood before him precisely the girl whom he had created out of his spirit.

And now the genie was dissolving again and rising toward the mountain top. He spoke from high above Gandle's head.

"It is as you asked. The red ribbon in her hair is my gift. I hope you will not mind. The girl in Chaldea had such a ribbon."

The voice of the genie rested and at the elbow of Gandle rose a horrid din. Yom, the big black dog, had found a tongue. He plunged and snarled and bayed until the flood of sound ran over the mountain. The first thought of Gandle was that the

dragons were upon him, but then he saw it was because of the girl. Juba had gone as wild, to the best of his ability, on moonlit nights and Gandle remembered that the dog at home reserved his fiercest outbursts for no tangible and natural terrors such as dragons but for shadows and other thin things out of life.

"Stop it," he shouted, and Yom was still and remained so, quivering. Perhaps it was the sudden terror, but Gandle trembled a little as he looked upon the girl. And yet it did not seem curious to him that she was naked. He spoke at last and asked, "What is your name?"

"It is for you to give me," she answered, and this was the second sweet sound Gandle had heard that night, for her voice was like the water of the fountain.

"I will call you Agatha," he said, "because you are the fairest lady in all the world."

"I am glad that I please my lord."

Gandle reached out and touched her hand. "Here it is cold," he said, and led her toward the palace. He held tight to her hand through the dark shadows, but even so he stumbled. That was a fearsome thing, for as he fell he lost her utterly. Out of his right hand flew the lamp and he sprawled upon sharp grasses.

"Agatha," he cried. No answer came. "Agatha," he shouted louder into a still night. "Yom, Yom, come here." But there was no dog nor could he see the palace, though the moon was bright. In the forest twigs crackled. It seemed to him that he was solitary and that Agatha had flown back into his spirit where he made her. In that thick darkness lived no other person. There was no one else in the world. Drowning in the darkness, Gandle sank deeper and deeper until he swept his right arm through the grass as if he swam

in water. His fingers fell upon something colder than damp earth and the lamp was his again. Again he knew the touch of the warm, small hand. Agatha was at his side and Yom followed close behind. The palace loomed before them. And terror was with him, too.

"I called," he said. "I called. Where were you?"

"Not far, not far," answered Agatha. "Your slave heard nothing."

"That is too far," replied Gandle drawing her close with one arm and with his other hand he rubbed the lamp and shouted, "Lights! Lights! I will have lights." The palace blazed. And it was under the fierce light of a hundred torches that Gandle learned that night why it was one man had fought and another died because they knew fair ladies.

It was not precisely learning, for as he closed his eyes, when the lights beat down

too harshly upon them, memories of desire floated up from the pool out of which Agatha had risen into being. And when he closed his eyes he held her the closer that she might not slip back again into the nothingness behind the mountain top. Beyond were dragons and this was fast alliance. And yet there was fury in it. Sometimes he thought of that and was surprised. But being startled did not keep the mood from all return. Fierce he was and shaken and a little of his angry ardor touched the genie. The slave had marred his command. Before morning Gandle remembered that his order had been, "Someone to talk to."

CHAPTER SIX

VERY slowly, in the days which followed, Gandle and Agatha came to the intimacy of talk. The barrier of dutifulness did not come down. "Your slave hears" or "My master has spoken," she would say. From her Gandle got none of the salt of dissent. Disagreement was not in her and he began to feel as if he slashed about in empty air like the knight whom he had left upon the road to duel in solitude. And always there lived with Gandle that same terror which seized upon him on the night the palace was built. Did he so much as turn his head away, he felt that Agatha was gone.

Yet it remained a fear which he could not render tangible. Often he tried to

learn whether there was truth in his terror. Sometimes, upon quitting a room where Agatha sat, Gandle would turn suddenly in the corridor and race back to the door. And always when he peered within Agatha was as he had left her. But he felt that he had not been quick enough. The horrible magic could happen within the time he took a single stride and there was somehow a hint of closeness in every test. Once he thought the mist from which she came was still upon her face as he darted through the curtains, but as he stared the sharp line where the black hair waved across her forehead was as definite as ever.

And again and again there was about this Agatha to whom he returned a quality not seen and yet barely beyond the edge of his senses. A wind had swept her to him from some immeasurable distance. She glided in and out of being even as he himself lived in the great mirror of the

palace only when he turned to face it. Just as silently and surely did Agatha complement the existence of Gandle, though, unlike the wraith of the mirror, she carried into her homecoming some subtle touch of the haste of this monstrous journey out of the land where nothing is.

Gandle, then, felt no security in this ally of his against solitude and big beasts. When he went to some high room of the palace he knew that he was alone within those walls. No friendly sound came to him from below. Night cast him into a dungeon until he could push back the walls by reaching out to touch her body. Sleep left him lonely as the dead man upon the road. He could even blink himself into the perils of wilderness. A hermit living with his shadow dwelt in greater chastity, but no more solitude.

And so he considered asking the genie for a son. To be a father, he believed,

would be a friendly thing. For his own father he had a warmth even though this was a man unknown to him. He remembered that in dreams spun just below the sound of trees crashing in the night a tall, strong figure had stood beside his bed. That would be his father.

When he mentioned the matter to the genie Yom was dubious.

"You think," he said, "that three might be company." The genie mused and added, "Is this to be a child of your flesh or one brought to the world through the magic of the lamp?"

"It is a son I want," Gandle told him. "I do not understand the rest. What difference does it make?"

"Just this," said Yom, "for the one it would be necessary for you to quit this palace and leave behind you Agatha and the lamp to find another woman. Then, after many months, out of ugliness and

agony, there could be a boy just large enough to fit within the crook of your arm."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Gandle, "larger. He must be larger, somebody to run with across the fields."

"That," answered Yom, "would have to be a child of the lamp. And for him there need be no waiting."

"Then, that is best."

Yom was silent.

"Why not? It must be best. You said for the other there would be months and ugliness and agony. How can that be good?"

"My wisdom is not wide enough to answer."

"This I can accomplish with my own knowledge," said Gandle sharply. "I know how such things are done." He remembered the carrot flakes which had become goldfish in the house of Baoz and the

peelings of the orange which later swam in the lake as little perch.

"Out of a tree," he said, "I shall make my son."

"That is one way," agreed Yom.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It seemed fitting to Gandle that Agatha should be with him when the child was made and so they went to the forest together in a bright dawn. Living with the lamp always at his side, Gandle was not used to waiting for his wishes, but this was momentous business and must not be marred by haste. The son of Gandle could not be cut out of the first tree they met upon that morning. The forest began with pines and they were tall trees and fragrant, but the sharp needles were not friendly to the touch and Gandle passed by the pines to go deeper into thickets. Next were maples fine and sturdy, but a wind came from over the mountain and the maples moaned in the wind. This would

not do. Gandle wanted no crying child. Crying was an evil thing; that he had already learned from the man he met and killed in his first encounter.

Strongest of all were the oaks and they stood fast against the wind and did not buckle when it blew. But the fingers of the oaks were crooked like those of Baoz, which cut into the shoulder of Gandle in the house of the magician. The forest thickened in front of them so that with each step it was necessary for Gandle to push aside branches which seemed to clutch at him and ask for birth. Then, suddenly, out of darkness, they broke through brush into bright sunlight. A lake, curved like a sword, lay at their feet. And all the shore was fringed with birches. These were white as the skin of Agatha and it seemed to Gandle that they frolicked. Even though rooted, they ran before the wind and rolled and wrestled

with it. Here would be a son for scampering and no great magic was needed to make any one of them come alive and away.

"On this shore I shall choose my child," said Gandle.

"It is well, master," Agatha assented.

Stepping from one rock to another and sometimes wading in the water, Gandle and Agatha walked the length of the lake and at last he stopped before a thin, young tree which brushed his forehead and seemed to touch him softly. This was of all the whitest and the straightest. Gandle drew a silver knife and trembled, for he was about to get his son. But before he cut he paused and said, "I must think what to call him. He should not come without a name. What should it be?"

"You must choose," answered Agatha.

"I want a red name, something friendly. A cheerful name for nights."

And he remembered burning logs in his uncle's house in winter and said, "I'll call him Flame for first and after that Gandle like myself."

Gandle cut, but not deeply, and held in his hand a sliver of the white bark of the tree. The underside was wet as if it bled. "He will be a brave son," said Gandle. "See, I have brought blood and he does not cry out."

For a full minute he held the bruised wood tight and nothing happened. Puzzled he turned to Agatha. "Where is my son?" he asked.

"It is necessary to rub the lamp," Agatha told him.

And so Gandle rubbed, and as he rubbed he cried out in a loud voice, "I want a son named Flame."

Now, he held by the hand a boy who

stood scarcely as high as his waist. That there should be no deceit or trick about the matter and to convince himself that here was his own true son, Gandle asked, "What is your name?"

"My name is Flame," said the boy, which made Gandle certain, for this was the name decided upon before the child was born. He spoke in a good voice, but not one altogether to the liking of Gandle, for it was almost precisely the sound of Agatha.

"I am your father," explained Gandle. "I am called Bunny Gandle."

"Yes, master," said Flame, and the heart of Gandle sank, for this was not the warmth and the glow for which he had hoped when he toiled through the trees to make himself a son.

"Bunny Gandle. Bunny is best."

"Bunny, my master," replied the boy.

And even so the love of Gandle went

out to this son of his so great in beauty and he had the longing to hold him close.

"I will carry you back," he said. "It is a long journey for one newborn."

"I can follow where you go, Bunny, master," answered the boy.

Vexed, Gandle walked fast and found himself, after a time, alone in a clearing. Agatha and Flame were not in sight. Indeed he felt that they had ceased. It was as in the old days when he went to a distant room and left Agatha to disappear. For such was her custom he believed. Listlessly he rubbed the lamp, and though he heard no rustle of leaves Agatha and Flame were at his side. He knew, then, that he had conjured up for himself another shadow. It was not a great disappointment, then, in later days when he learned that Flame was no better playfellow than Yom, the big dog, but only one who did the things commanded.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ONCE upon a morning he looked from a high window and found Flame Gandle and Yom furious in play. The dog leaped again and again and thrust both paws upon the chest of the child, but it was a sturdy lad and each time he pushed Yom down and rapped him hard across the nose. Quickly, Gandle hurried to join in the game, but, as he came out to the sunlight of the palace lawn, both dog and boy were upon the instant done with their frolic. Flame bowed gravely to his father and Yom sat respectfully upon his haunches awaiting orders.

"Go on," said Gandle sharply. "I want you to play again."

They did obediently and it was not the

same game. Yom held back more than half his heft when he leaped and the child's smacks across the snout were no more than a vigorous sort of patting. Still, they seemed ready to go on indefinitely with this dull pretense until Gandle, burning with resentful boredom, called out to them to stop.

Almost he regretted the miracle of fatherhood which he had performed upon the shore of the lake. Flame was then, while still the leaves were on him, more free and friendly. It had been a mistake to uproot him. Often Gandle looked hard into the eyes of the boy in hope that as from a mirror something of himself would be reflected back. There was nothing. He himself and no other in the world was Gandle. And in succeeding days he turned more often to the genie, summoning him through the easy friction of the lamp even when no command was in his mind. For

he found increasingly some hint of conflict in the will of Yom, the large. Always the genie did as he was told, but he did not spring so servilely to execute an order as did the girl, the dog or the boy. In particular, trivial requests seemed to set up in Yom an irritation. The smoke which was his belly curdled sometimes in disdain when light compulsions were put upon him.

"Bring me," Gandle would say in the morning, "two poached eggs."

Rather slowly the gigantic storm cloud would hop over the mountain and return bearing the order perfectly executed. These were eggs of an unimpeachable freshness and the toast upon which they tiptoed was crisp but never burned. Still Gandle had some feeling that the mighty metamorphosis of man into mist and back to man again was a convulsion disproportionate to the result. He had some vague

misgiving that one should not tap the ether for his eggs.

But it was Yom who made bold at length to speak out and say, "You could keep hens."

"Let there be hens," agreed Gandle genially and back of the palace there rose a monstrous structure of wood and wire. These were no chickens such as Gandle had heard back in the valley of his uncle. Never a cock crew nor did a hen cackle until Gandle was stretched and wide awake. He gathered the eggs himself and Agatha cooked them. Her art was as precise and finished as that of the genie. But this was not altogether pleasing to Gandle. It would have delighted him to have found a blemish. Each morning he sought some black smudge of inattention upon the surface of the toast and there was none.

He desired the impact of a quarrel.

Once again he wanted to feel the same thrill which had come to him when his fingers had closed around the throat of the man who had opposed him on the road. Often Gandle thought of the dead warrior and he loved him because he had killed him. But from Agatha there never came any of the fierce and heady stimulant of opposition. His battle cries went unanswered. Challenges he flung at her and they fell to the ground heavy as rain upon a dusty road. If he said the toast was burned when it was not (and he had recourse to this device) Agatha would answer, "Thy slave has offended," and she would go at once to the kitchen and cook for him again, returning with toast which was no better and no worse than the last slice, since each was perfect. And so upon a certain morning he rubbed the lamp and summoned the genie.

"What is your command?" asked Yom.

"I want to talk," said Gandle, and he motioned to the large meadow to indicate that the genie might sit down if he could crowd himself into ten acres.

"It is dull here," said Gandle provocatively, and waited.

Yom made no reply and again, in crosser tones, Gandle repeated his complaint.

"Yes," said the genie, "I have seen many lands in long ages. Here, too, it would be dull."

"But I don't like that."

"No," answered Yom, "none of them has liked it."

"You must do something about it," broke in Gandle, irritated at the calm of the big philosopher.

Yom knitted his brows and twice he shook his head, dousing the sky so that the sun seemed to blink. After a very long pause he said without enthusiasm, "I might bring you a woman."

"You brought me a woman already," said Gandle, horrified. "I asked you for that a long time ago and you brought her —the fairest lady in all the world."

"So I did. Your slave has not forgotten. I never forget facts or dates. I meant another woman. After all, you've had this one three months. She is dark and now I might fetch you one who is fair. You could have one taller or shorter. I could bring you a woman with two heads or one with the tail of a fish."

"What for?"

"Oh, it would be a change."

"I don't want another woman," said Gandle, feeling in some way that he himself was belittled when the genie spoke thus casually of Agatha. "She is," added Gandle, "the fairest lady in all the land. Why should I want another?"

"As to that I can't say," replied Yom, "but in ten thousand years I have found

it so. Very often, almost always, they have ordered others.

"Tell me," continued the genie in his most colloquial manner, "is the ribbon in her hair still so red as it was that night when first I fetched her?"

"What ribbon? Oh, I don't know. I haven't noticed. I suppose it's still red. What would it be?"

"I really think," said Yom critically, "that you ought to order another woman."

"Well, I won't," cried Gandle and stamped his foot. "This one's mine and I'm used to her. We get along all right. What makes you think we don't? I'm not going to have one woman after another popping in here at the palace—with two heads and the tail of a fish. If I let you take this one away you might give her to somebody else."

And until now Gandle had been only annoyed at the words of Yom, but of a

sudden his face flushed and something stirred a pounding in his chest. Once again the world turned red to his eyes. For an instant he was minded to leap forward at the genie and to seize him by the throat, but the idea was discarded almost as soon as it came into being. He could not reach so high and even though he spanned his arms around that huge brown throat not so much as his finger-tips would touch at the end of the circle. The pounding went on in the chest of Gandle and the flame in his face burned. Finally he screamed and his voice broke into a treble of intensity. "You let Agatha alone," he piped.

Yom smiled, for this was not the first time in ten thousand years he had come upon jealousy. It was an emotion new to Gandle. He found it unpleasant.

After his outbreak, Gandle felt a little better and the genie maintained a re-

spectful silence for many minutes before he said, "If I may be so bold as to ask a highly personal question, what is your life with Agatha? How do you amuse yourselves?"

"In the night," answered Gandle, "we lie close and sleep and wake and sleep again. And that amuses me. Then by day I walk about the palace and sometimes into the woods and Agatha sits in her room or goes to the kitchen and cooks."

"But haven't you any games?"

"In the night," began Gandle, and for the first time in their acquaintanceship Yom interrupted.

"About the night I know," broke in the genie, for he was old and of Arabia where such tales are numerous. Still, he was not angry, for he went on gently, "Your nights are as God has made the nights of all men, but it seems to me you lack a proper variety

of diversions. Agatha could sing for you and tell you stories."

"She never has," said Gandle.

"You must ask. That is the burden put on those who own the lamp. Nothing will come to you unbidden. And that is a heavy burden, for you must know what you want. Or seem to know. And knowing, you must make command."

CHAPTER NINE

GANDLE was eager to test these new delights within the power of Agatha and so he dismissed Yom and hurried to the palace. Bursting in upon her he said, "I want a song."

"Of what shall I sing?" asked Agatha.

"Sing me of something I have not known."

Agatha sang of love. And this was a queer thing, this love. It was a flame and a flower and a wind from the corner of the moon. Flame and flower and wind from the moon, all these Gandle knew, but here were three, and love, so it seemed from the song, was one. He would have asked a question, but the song was a spell. As the water in the fountain had captured his attention by the beat of its sound on

that moonlight night, so now, under broad sun, did the music hold him silent. For the moment it was not important to understand. The world was lovely and it was a safe world when the steady, unending pulse of it came thus to the ear of man.

"Love" and again "love." It was a sound he liked just for the ring of it. And after the last note floated toward the mountain top and over, Gandle waited. But, then, he had to know.

"Love, love, it is all love in the song. But what is it? How can it be a flame and a flower. Tell me about it. Can I find it? Where and how does it grow?"

"No," said Agatha, "it is not like that. It is not to be seen. Only they can feel it, a man and a woman."

"I am a man— I have not felt it. And you are a woman. Have you got it?"

"No," answered Agatha, and he heard the voice of her break as it had never done

before. He could not be sure, because her head was turned away, but it seemed to him that she was crying. That was strange. No one had cut her with a sword.

And he spoke sharply. "Why do you say 'No'?"

"I cannot. I cannot. It is not for me. First I would have to be and I am the slave of the lamp."

All this made it no clearer to Gandle. "Sing of it again," he suggested, "or tell me a story and perhaps it will become more plain to us."

And Agatha told him of Damien, the Prince from the Purple Land, and how he clambered up the mountain of glass to slay the dragon Gorgas who held Elaine, the princess, captive. For two days and nights Damien fought with the monster before he could subdue it and during all that struggle Elaine stood in a window of

the tower and always he saw her golden hair and knew that he must go on.

"I think," commented Gandle, "it would have been simpler for him to rub the lamp and say to some genie, 'Fetch me Elaine.'"

"No," said Agatha with a vehemence. "No, it would not be the same. He fought for her and so she loved him and he loved her."

"Damien had no lamp," she added.

"Oh, well, then!" said Gandle. "He should have had a lamp," he continued. "The dragon might have killed him. Without a lamp things are more difficult."

But at that Gandle remembered he had no lamp when he killed his man on the road at the beginning of his journey.

Agatha told him, then, of Ruddybold, who, from the deck of his vessel, saw Vanetal upon the beach of an island. He

had scarce looked upon her across foaming water when a great storm rose up and drove the ship away into scudding clouds. In the morning there was no island nor ever again until he had sailed the seas for forty years to find once more the palms and the white beach with Vanetal upon the shore.

"Forty years," said Gandle, incredulous. "It is so long. He would be old and Vanetal, too. In so much roaming around he should have found another island and another princess."

"But it was Vanetal he loved."

"He could have called this other Vanetal."

"But no," explained Agatha, "it was not the name he sought. He did not know the name. Only he knew her and it was necessary for him to seek even if it had been a hundred years. Because, you see, he loved."

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Gandle pondered upon this. "A little love I might like," he decided, "but so much would make a man uneasy and disturb his rest. Here I have a palace and the fairest lady in all the land. Why should I sail long oceans and climb mountains of glass?"

Possibly his heart was not as certain as his words, for he asked for other songs and stories and until the moon came up Agatha told him of Galen and the maid, of the Princess of the Silver Grotto, of Hage and his magic carpet, of Zale and Cinafar and of the little prince who went behind the moon. And there must have been twenty times during that day and night upon which Gandle declared himself and announced that the tasks of love were too heavy and wearisome no matter what this thing love might be. But it was Gandle who rose first and went through the woods where the great river ran. From here it

was possible to see only the highest tower of the palace and in this lonely spot Gandle rubbed the lamp and summoned Yom. The genie settled himself with the lower part of his back upon one side of the river and his feet upon the other.

CHAPTER TEN

"BRING me love," said Gandle, "just a little of it."

"I can't do it."

"You must," cried Gandle, angry. "You are the slave of this lamp. Whatever I command you must fetch me."

"I can bring," said Yom, "only that which I have. There is a genie land beyond and above the mountains. And there we have wide shelves and goods upon them. Large things are there and little ones. I have brought you a palace and also a poached egg. I have brought you the fairest lady in all the land. To be sure, since we are speaking frankly, every lady in stock comes from precisely the same counter. That is why I felt I should

be doing you no disfavor if I brought another. As far as women go we genii are democratic. We not only think, we know that in our establishment one is just as good as another. Now anything that may be taken down from the shelf and wrapped up I can get and promise prompt delivery to town or village or to the ends of the earth. But love, that I can't get for you."

"I only asked for a little," said Gandle sulkily.

"Little or much what difference does it make? It is not size which stops me. Do you remember some time back you wanted virtue and I dissuaded you. Now it's love. That's even harder. I told you, then, that these were words and my business was to fetch and carry things."

"But I ought to be able to get a word when I want it," insisted Gandle. "You talk as if words were nothing at all. Ruddybold sailed all over the ocean for

forty years on account of love and you tell me it's just a word. I'm telling you I'd much rather have a word than a poached egg."

"Come now," said Yom professorially, "be fair. I didn't say words were unimportant. I said they were difficult. You can't pick them up by the ears or the scruff of the neck. There's nothing to catch hold of and they wriggle around."

"You're a hundred times my size," scolded Gandle scornfully, "but I'd be ashamed to go flying over mountains and back again with a couple of poached eggs in my hand. Anybody can get eggs and poach them. Agatha can poach eggs."

"The palace was pretty big," remonstrated Yom good-humoredly.

"It isn't so very big. Not big for you. What do I care about the palace anyway? I'm sick of the palace. What I want is just a little love."

In a passion Gandle rubbed the lamp and stamped his foot and said, "Bring me a little love."

"I can't."

Gandle drew back his arm and threw the lamp with all his might. He aimed for a spot midway between the eyes of Yom, but the river was far wider than he had anticipated. The lamp fell in the very centre of the swift stream. There was a splash and some ripples and the water returned to its normal corrugations.

Yom stretched both arms above his head and yawned prodigiously.

"Nothing to do till the next century," he said. "Nobody's going to find that lamp in a hurry."

At first Gandle did not quite realize the consequences of his act. Then there came to him the fear that he had lost a reliable and well-trained servant. He made the test. "You might bring me that woman

with two heads you were speaking about," he suggested.

"Bunny," said Yom full-throatedly, "go chase yourself. You can't order me around any more. Where's your lamp?"

Gandle looked for it and saw nothing but swift, green water.

"A woman with two heads would be no trouble for you," he wheedled.

"Not a bit," admitted Yom, "but why should I bother? I'm going away to take a long rest and amuse myself in my own way."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to prepare poached eggs and eat them myself. I like poached eggs."

"Couldn't you just bring me a few more things before you go away?" asked Gandle humbly.

"No, I can't. Even if I wanted to I couldn't. Genii may serve only the master of the lamp. But there is one thing I can

give you right now and it is more valuable than a lady with two heads. I'm going to give you——"

"What?"

"Don't speak when I'm talking," said Yom severely. "I was about to say when you interrupted me that I am going to give you something more valuable than all the two-headed ladies in the world. And this is something I couldn't have given you before because it's a word like love and virtue and hard to handle. The name of it is advice. You were asking just now for a little love. That's a silly thing to ask for. A little is no use. Either go in for the whole thing or nothing at all. I had a girl once in Chaldea——"

"Oh, shut up," cut in Gandle rudely. "I don't want to hear about her. You talk too much. It was two thousand years ago. What's that got to do with me?"

"Very well," answered Yom in a pained

voice, "very well. I was never a person to force myself on anyone when I wasn't wanted. Quite the contrary. You began it. You started this discussion about love. I was only trying to be helpful. After all, love isn't brand new. We did have it in Chaldea. And I'm not boasting when I admit I am wise. Just think of the opportunities I've had. I've served thousands of men who had that lamp and every one of them, every one, mind you, with just a single exception, has ordered me to fetch him a girl. It's been girls in the desert, girls on the mountain tops and girls out to the little ships in the sea. The things I've seen would make a book. I've always meant to do a book some day if I could get the time."

And for a moment Yom paused and looked anxiously out into the middle of the river to reassure himself that the current still ran swiftly and that the lamp

had not become entangled in any lily pad.

"I didn't mean to be rude," apologized Gandle. "I was irritated because I was foolish and threw away the lamp."

"Well, now that's a question. I don't know whether you were foolish or not. Time will tell. It's my belief nobody ever got much good out of that lamp. Somehow none of them could think up many things to wish for. A girl, a palace and a bag of gold and that's the end of it. Wanting things is fun. Getting them ruins your appetite. I've been a wanter all my life and tell me do I look three thousand years old?"

"No," said Gandle judiciously, "not half that."

Yom smiled proudly. "As a matter of fact, it will be five thousand six hundred and ninety-four next Thursday. Would you like to hear how I did it?"

"Very much, but as a matter of fact, I

think I ought to be getting back to the palace."

"The palace!" said Yom in surprise. "Don't you know? That's gone. It went so," and he snapped his fingers in the air. "It had to go when you threw away the lamp."

"And Agatha?" cried Gandle.

"Oh, yes, indeed, Agatha, she's gone, too. You see, she was of the lamp."

"And Flame Gandle and the dog Yom?"

"All gone. Quite."

"Agatha's gone," repeated Gandle as if to beat down the fact by the force of repetition. "Gone? Gone for good? Gone where?"

"That would be hard to say," replied Yom. "It's metaphysical. I suppose you might say that in a sense she still is as much as she ever was. More, probably, because she has been. Try to think of time as a straight line. Today is not more

real than yesterday or tomorrow. If you could get high enough to pass out of time all this would be spread before you as if you sat in a reviewing stand and watched a procession seeing simultaneously the beginning and the end. No one troop in that cavalcade would be more real than any other."

"But is she there? When I come through that little stretch of forest will I see her where the palace was? Can she hear me now?"

Gandle shouted "Agatha, Agatha, Agatha."

"Not loud enough," said Yom. "It isn't in your lungs to reach her. Not in any lungs. Listen, I'll shout for you."

This was a noise which rocked the hills and gave unsteady footing. The sound came back from every peak round about the valley. "Agatha," roared the readiest of the echoes. And then the name

came trooping in from all quarters as if giant grenadiers were answering roll call. One sound would come nip upon the heels of another and then three or four "Agathas" would arrive in a blanket finish. But after the last whisper there was no answer.

"See," said Yom, so gently that his voice fell below a roar, "she's past calling for."

"Look into your heart and into your head," he added. "You have her now. That used to worry you. I know that. The twoness of you made it lonely. The thing that is you could not break through ever to touch truly this person who was another. You wanted to know that you were not solitary in the world. We come into life hardshelled and sealed like a genie in a jar. Deep inside is that fiber called the soul. Souls can't kiss or embrace. They can't meet like lips. You

must have learned that. Everybody is looking for that sure contact and it can't be. I'm talking to you and I see you and sometimes I hear you. At least I think I hear you and see you, but that doesn't make me at all certain that you are. Maybe you're just a vibration in one of the cells of my head. Certainly you're not so real to me as I am to myself. Not an ache in me nor a leap of joy can go so much as a quarter of an inch beyond this poor little carcass of my own," and Yom indicated the limits of his own sensations by sweeping his left hand five hundred feet from the top of his head to the heel of an outstretched foot.

"Maybe you don't follow me. I mean that the memory of Agatha, Agatha as a sensation and not a personality, is all yours. That she has come through the hardshell into your fiber, into that citadel which is

you, unmistakably you. You've lost her and so you've found her."

Never before had Gandle met a paradox and he was not in the mood. He shook his head as if to clear it just as he had done when he fought on the road under the noon sun. Then he leaped to his feet and ran through the woods to the spot where the palace once had been.

"Poor young fellow," mused Yom, "my heart bleeds for him."

But here the genie checked himself and reexamined his thought. "That's just a lie," he told himself. "My heart isn't bleeding at all. I know that he's suffering, but my emotion toward him is simply one of interest. As genii go I'm not hard-boiled, but I can't help contrasting my own wellbeing with his despondency, and getting pleasure out of the contrast."

And then he added to his inner soliloquy, "I talked to him quite beautifully and I'm

afraid he didn't understand a word of it. The whole thing was wasted."

Yom frowned over this thought, but almost immediately his face lighted up and he nodded in complete agreement with himself. "Of course," he said, "I could put it in the book."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

It was the old wood through which Gandle ran. He could see the blaze of the sun where the line of trees left off. Scarcely a hundred yards beyond should stand the palace. Even from the heart of the forest the high turret would be visible if he looked up and the palace still was. But he did not look up. He reserved the ordeal of testing the catastrophe until the last minute. Even when he broke through to the meadow Gandle kept his head averted. Somehow he seemed moved to think that if he threw his glance into the right direction suddenly enough he might catch this house of his on the wing and drag it back to earth.

Finally, he could dodge the issue no longer. He swung his head about and saw

a green field disorderly with daisies. It sloped down to a long road upon which the heat waves rose and fell with the rhythm of the departed fountains. The henhouse was gone, as well as the palace. No living thing moved about in the deserted field. This had been grass close cropped by sheep. Now it rose knee high. He kicked about the patch where Yom had buried bones. There were none. It was not in his heart to call again for Agatha and so he cried out for Flame, but the annoying obedience of that son of his had ended.

Near the spot where the great door had been Gandle caught a gleam. He rushed to it, thinking that by some magic chance here was the lamp again, fished from out the stream for his good fortune. Perhaps, the whole thing had been only a trick to try him. It was punishment for being overly casual with Agatha. The

shining thing was not a lamp. Instead, he found the sword which he had won with his own hands. A few feet beyond it was another relic, the last remaining out of the palace. The lords of genie land had allowed him to retain the red ribbon. He looked at it closely and by now he could have answered Yom's question. It had not faded.

Gandle dropped into the grass and took an inventory of his equipment. He had an excellent sword, a magic cap, a red ribbon and something intangible which Yom had called a memory. That did not go on Gandle's list. He could not feel the heft of it in his hand. And now for the first time in many months Gandle found within himself the desire for many things. Jewels, a shield, a horse, a magic carpet like the one of Hage in the story—why had he called for none of these while still he had the lamp? Even the woman with the tail

of a fish might have been fun. She could have been set to swimming roundabout in the fountain. And a woman with two heads! This might well have been a sight most interesting and curious.

Of simpler needs, he noticed both thirst and hunger and perhaps a fan to cool himself from the heat of the sun. He thought of a fan of golden feathers. Damien had brought such a gift from the Purple Land to the Princess. After pining for a while, Gandle rose and cut down a bough from a tree. It served his purpose. He waved the branch and said, to make certain that all magic had left him, "I want a son." The minutes passed and lengthened and he remained childless.

Was it true, he thought, that life was hard when one got only everything he wanted. But, as a matter of fact, the lamp was not as good as that. Without it he could try for love in which so many people

seemed interested. By now his curiosity was pared to a point. The question of whether he should take much or little might be determined later. That could be decided after he had tried it. The search of Ruddybold required forty years, which was much too long, but that was on the sea where no paths lay before him. The road invited Gandle. It must lead somewhere and perhaps to love. The men with whom he fought said that they were lovers and this was their road.

Only for a little while did Gandle rest, for he was not willing to be caught by the darkness in this spot where he had lain close to Agatha. To wake and reach out for her and find her gone, that would be the worst. Under the blue and sunny sky it was not so bad. The thin, white cloud which raced overhead and held his eye would make no different picture if Agatha were beside him. If only he had kept the

lamp he might have heard more songs. Was it as Yom said that he held them in his head like true and actual things?

What if they were gone? He could find other songs. And another woman. Yom, the wise, had said he needed another. Still, he hoped she would look like Agatha. He preferred one head and that a dark one.

Thinking would solve none of this and so he got to his feet and started down the road, still moving toward new lands and away from the town of his birth and the house of Baoz. As he walked he swished his sword and cut the tops from daisies.

"Palaces seem to go just as fast as they come," he said regretfully, for his legs were no longer much used to walking. And in him was the old itch for someone to talk to. Or even someone to swing his sword against. The silence terrified him so that at the end of an hour he shouted

"My name is Bunny Gandle." There was no answer.

"This is my sword," he cried aloud.

After many miles he came upon a man beside the road who was not dead and yet his sleep was so heavy that Gandle could not arouse him. For half an hour he rested beside him, propping his back against that of the senseless one. And Gandle talked continually at him and told of Agatha and both the Yoms and Flame Gandle.

"As fine a boy as you would care to see," he shouted in the ear of the sleeper, who never stirred.

Up again at last, he walked many another mile before he met a traveler who was blind and carried stick and bell. And after him a man who shook his head when Gandle spoke to him and tapped fingers upon his ears to indicate that he was deaf. One other passed who showed a cleft

tongue and could not speak. And all this was queer and disturbing to Gandle. It seemed to him that in this land of the lamp nothing was quite real. Everyone he met was in some way set apart and out of life. At length he saw one working in a field and to him Gandle called, "My name is Bunny Gandle."

The toiler paused and shouted back, "Mine's Enoch Amos."

Gandle drew a deep breath. He was again among the living and he walked faster though now the road was all upward into hills. Toward sundown he saw ahead of him a hill which gleamed much brighter than any of the rest. Indeed, it was so bright when sunlight struck it squarely that Gandle had to avert his eyes. As he drew closer he learned the cause of this. The mountain was made of glass. Upon it stood a great castle. And this was luck, for upon such a mountain the Prince

from the Purple Land had killed Gorgas, the dragon, and found Elaine, who was love. According to Agatha's story the fight had lasted two full days. Gandle was already weary and he determined to make it shorter this time.

CHAPTER TWELVE

PRESENTLY he stood at the foot of the glass mountain and gazed up. It was fearsomely steep and halfway to the summit he saw two dragons simmering. Of course Gandle had seen dragons in his own woods at home, but these were far larger and might be highly dangerous when irritated. It was not his plan to fight at all with these outlying dragons. Eluding them would be the simpler way and the magic cap would make that possible. Still, the mere task of ascending this smooth and highly polished mountain was no mean feat and it would be best first of all to ascertain whether he had come to the right place.

Cupping his hands, Gandle shouted up

toward the castle, "Have you a princess held in foul captivity?"

At once the answer came roaring back, "Twenty fair princesses held in durance most vile and unspeakable."

This was rather more than Gandle had bargained for and besides the voice quite evidently was that of a giant and not of a dragon. Dragons invariably pronounce "v" as if it were "w". The word would have been "wile" if this were at all the usual sort of dragon. Killing a giant might be harder than slaying a dragon. Gandle didn't know much about giants.

"If," thought Gandle to himself, "the Prince from the Purple Land fought two days to free Elaine it will be longer to free twenty princesses."

Fortunately, he could not do multiplication and so he escaped the terror of the fearsome quotient. Still, he did not hesitate.

"Come up the hill," roared the voice again, "and I'll crunch your bones."

And on that instant Gandle ceased to ponder and began to move with suddenness surprising to himself. The same invigorating redness of mood which had vitalized him once to choke a man was again upon him.

Swiftly, he clambered over the glass. It was more difficult than he had assumed, for the surface was not wholly smooth. Here and there the giant had left broken fragments about, and, once or twice, when Gandle slipped to his hands he cut himself. But this left him redder even than when he began. So hastily had he started the ascent that his magic cap had been forgotten and he remembered it only when one of the dragons shot out a long stream of fire in his direction. Gandle stepped back to dodge the flame and, as he did so, lost his footing. Down and down he

slid and rolled, for there was nothing to which he might cling. And as he slid it was not his good fortune to escape all the spots where lay the broken glass. The solid earth at the bottom of the mountain rose up to meet him.

Gingerly, Gandle picked himself up, for there was no comfort in resting upon his back where he had fallen. This time he adjusted the magic cap before he began the ascent, but during this brief delay the aroused dragons had become far more fiery. They were well beyond simmering. Great clouds of steam rose from their nostrils. The flames from their tongues were now blue with newly generated heat. Though Gandle climbed up in such a way as to pass around both dragons, he could find no path by which the glass was not hot underfoot. Hotter and hotter it grew as he ascended higher. He tried to walk upon his toes to make the surface of con-

tact as slight as possible and as he did so he slipped for the second time. This fall left him in a sitting posture and it was in this position that he slid an unbroken journey back to the road again.

Gandle knew nothing of the laws of physics and it may be that some of the sensations of great discomfort which he attributed to the fiery breath of the dragons were rather caused by friction. Perhaps it was a little of both. At any rate Gandle was in a sorry plight when once again the road met him. The momentum was so great that twice he bounced before his tortured body came to pause if not to rest. That part of him which before was only bruised by now had blistered.

Nothing of this sort had been mentioned in the story of the Prince of the Purple Land. Even the sight of the mountain had come to annoy Gandle and laboriously he

rose and limped down the road, leaving castle and giant behind him. He tried to dismiss from his mind the whole unpleasant adventure.

Still, the phrase "Twenty fair princesses" lingered. He rather felt that this should be a challenge, a fighting word like that other which he had learned early in his journey out into the world. But he had in him not the slightest urge toward fighting. On and on he walked in spite of the painfulness of the procedure.

"Twenty fair princesses, twenty fair princesses."

The words rang and rang. At last Gandle came to a spot where there was dark water and a tree and round its roots grew moss. Here Gandle sat. By now he had put fully four miles between himself and the castle.

"Twenty fair princesses." The words returned to plague him now that the tor-

ment of his body had eased a little. He leaned back against a tree and tried to relax.

"I guess," said Gandle to himself, "that giant was just lying."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GANDLE slept well enough, although once he thought that Agatha was beside him, and in reaching out for her, he woke under black skies. This was not like the old days, for then it was only in dreams that she slipped away. So pitch was the darkness that Gandle began to fear he had become as the blind man who passed him on the road. Nor was there anything to touch. The tree underneath which he had thrown himself was not to be found by his clutching fingers. Panic came upon him. This might be death, for touch and sight and sound were all absent. Again he stretched out to find some limit of this ether, and as he did so, one of his blisters twinged. It was a reassuring pang, for as the pain flamed up Gandle moaned. Sound and sensation were with him in this wilderness.

After a long time, the trees rose up before him against the faint promise of the dawn. But something of fear still remained with Gandle and he was eager to be away from a place so silent. Down the road he walked, letting his feet clump on the earth as he moved along. And, to lessen loneliness, he sang all he could remember of the song of Ruddybold and Vanetal. Up rose the sun and louder sang Gandle and so intent was he upon these devices of his own that he leaped in the air when, at a turn in the road, a man behind a bush called softly, "Less noise!"

"Why?" asked Gandle aggressively. "My song is a good song."

"Perhaps," said the stranger in a whisper, "but he may not think so. He does not wake yet."

It was upon the word "he" that his voice fell away to nothing.

"Who? Who?" cried out Gandle, who loved names.

"Not so loud."

"Much louder," insisted Gandle. "Is it a dragon or a giant? I have a sword."

"I've killed both," he added, even though it was not true.

The man behind the bush peered out and looked up and down the road before he said, "We think he's a god."

"Who is a god and what is it?" Gandle wanted to know.

The stranger came slowly toward him and indicated that what he had to say must be spoken closely. Even so Gandle could not hear the hot mumble in his ear.

"Speak up," he said sharply.

Terror was on the face of the whisperer and he shook his head violently.

"No one is allowed," he answered quite audibly. "That is the one thing that man is forbidden. You may talk in his cave and

even be rude to him, but you must not say his name. Then the doom would come."

"What doom?"

"We don't know. That makes it worse. No one knows."

"Well, who says a doom will fall?"

"My father told me and before him his father. It was always so."

"But I don't like it," said Gandle. "People must have names. That's how you call them. Is he ashamed of his name? My name's Bunny Gandle. I'd just as soon shout it."

And thereupon Gandle did.

"But you're not a god," objected the man.

"I may be. I don't know what it is and so there's no harm trying."

For the first time the man smiled. "A god is one who keeps death at his fingertips."

"Oh, that!" Gandle held out both hands. "These have killed."

"But he could kill not one but all and never move a finger."

"Did you ever see him do it?"

The man shuddered and drew back. Something was bubbling in Gandle.

"Take me to him," he urged, but even as he swaggered a moving muscle touched upon a sore spot. "Does he live on top of that glass mountain?" Gandle added with some concern.

"No," said the man. "In a cave," and he pointed to a hill only a few yards from the road.

And again Gandle bubbled and his heart danced. "Now, then," he continued, "what is it that no one must do, that even Bunny Gandle may not do?"

"It is forbidden in the cave to mention by so much as a whisper the name of the god."

"Well, what is the name? Well? Oh, come, this is no cave, but an open road."

Once more the man drew close, and cupping his hands over the ear of Gandle he said in a tiny voice, "Kla."

"Show me now," said Gandle, "the way to this cave."

The man pointed and fell back. Gandle, advancing, saw that he ran full speed across the meadows.

The way was thick with heavy grass as Gandle moved toward the hill. Soon he saw a path and at its edge grew violets. He picked a bunch and tied the stems with the red ribbon of Agatha. Following the path, he came to an opening in the hill. It was not dark within, but dusky. Other men were at the cave mouth and women and some children. Many left food just under the first arch of the rock. A big, brown jug of red liquor caught the eye of Gandle and he lifted it to drink.

"It is the god's wine," said a man, but Gandle pushed him away.

"I'm a god," he explained, and drank deeply.

And when he had finished he felt that he had spoken the truth, for at that moment he knew that he could kill all living things and never move a finger. For no reason, he said, even as on the road a moment ago, "My name is Bunny Gandle." Only this time he shouted much louder.

As he entered the cave the men and women and the children ran from under the arch and across the road. Gandle was alone in the cave. He did not know it would be so high and the god was more monstrous than he had supposed. Green stone he was and both his heads brushed against the roof.

"He is," thought Gandle, "perhaps the brother of that woman of whom Yom spoke to me."

And all four eyes were red and flashed though it was dark.

"I'm glad I did not ask to have her brought to my palace."

Stone he was, but as Gandle stared at him the eyes of the god blinked lazily. The sound of all the clanking lids was evil. And now Gandle was less sure that he himself was a god. Certainly he was not so big a god and lesser headed.

Gandle looked back at the door through which he had come. He had taken, as he remembered, no more than a step or two, but this window out of the darkness was now distant. And it was then that Gandle noticed his feet bore him always closer to the god, though he had ordered them not at all for minutes. And he was not alone. A woman with red hair stood under the archway.

"Have you come to look or to name him?" she said.

Gandle did not answer, but turned to gaze again upon the god, and once more the eyes blinked. It was a louder sound and still unpleasant.

"I will stop here," Gandle decided, but he continued to move closer.

"He doesn't mind your looking at him," said the woman. "That's safe enough."

"And standing in the doorway, that's safe," rejoined Gandle.

She moved out of the sunlight into the dusk and in these shadows her hair still shone red. At first she walked and then she ran and her feet clattered in the cave. Up to Gandle, her shoulder touching his, she came.

"Now," said the woman.

"You have too many heads," said Gandle to the god, not in a very loud voice.

The eyelids of green stone fluttered, but did not fall.

"Name him," said the woman.

"Bastard," cried Gandle, falling back upon his old fighting word and growing greater in volume.

"Name him," screamed the woman, trembling with excitement, and her right hand clutched the elbow of Gandle. "Now," she said.

Gandle thrust out an arm to hold his body off from contact with the ankles of the god. He breathed deep till his lungs sang and then he loosed all the air that was in him into a great shout of "Kla!" And then in a torrent he cried again and again, "Kla! Kla! Kla! Kla!"

The word buffeted about from wall to wall. It rang and tumbled from the roof and along the floor. And the great god swayed. Before only the eyelids had moved, but now the huge heads bowed. Slowly at first, and then with a rush and a roar, Kla, all of him, fell to the floor

of the cave. A wind raged against the face of Gandle. Dust blinded him. It was dry and sharp in his nose and mouth. He gulped for air and his throat burned with sharp particles. And then from many miles there came a voice whispering in his ear, "My little man. My little man."

Beneath his head was something warm and soft. Gandle blinked and was born again into life. For almost a minute he held no curiosity to know more and all this time he sobbed and beat with his hands against the dust which lay about him. Sunlight sweeping under the arch flowed to his eyes. Gandle looked up and the red-haired woman smiled at him. His head was in her lap.

"The god?" he said.

"Kla is dust on the floor," she answered. "All of him crumbled when he fell. See," and she held up a handful of gray sand. It was flecked with crimson.

"His eyes were of red currants. Eat. They are sweet."

And she held berries to his mouth. The warm juice was gentle in his throat. Gandle removed his head from her lap and stood. Twice he coughed to clear his lungs and then he stretched out his arms and shouted with the same voice that had sent Kla spinning, "My name is Bunny Gandle and I am a god."

She tugged at his hand and pulled him down to her again.

"My name is Laida," she said, more softly, "and I am a woman."

She stroked his forehead. "Come," she said, "you should eat bread and rest, for you have killed a god."

Laida brushed the dust of the dead god from her hair and took the arm of Gandle, but before they quit the cave he stooped for the violets and gave them to her.

"You were with me when I killed Kla," said Gandle.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Heavy with honey and adventure, Gandle fell off to sleep with a breadcrust in his hand. It was night when he awoke in the house of the red-haired woman. The little house enclosed a large room. They had come to it through a narrow path between tall trees. And now they had meat and wine, and candles stood between them on the table. In the shadow, far from them, stairs climbed up to places beyond the candle light. Gandle, less hungry than before, looked long at the woman. Often, it was as much as a minute before his hand, with hot food in his fingers, rose up to his mouth. He knew, and he had known from the beginning, that Laida was not so fair as Agatha. If she, too, had been made according to his commands he

would have had her shorter by inches. When they stood shoulder to shoulder in the cave of Kla her head was as high as his own. The flicker of the candle light threw shadows across her face, but some it found. Agatha was younger.

But the girl of the lamp did not glow like this woman. There was a flame in the red hair and a smolder in the green eyes. Her skin was freckled here and there like a pebbled beach. In body slighter, she was of more substantial spirit than the woman he had known. Laida never flew over the mountain top. Sometimes, when Gandle's head was bent toward his plate, he could feel her eyes upon him. Even when he did not look she was only a table's length away. By her side he could sleep without fear that she would dance off into nothingness as his eyes closed. Yom, in his wild talk, had been all wrong. Gandle knew now that he was not solitary. Here, for

good or evil, was another person in this same world of his.

And so, for that night, he decided to be with her. In this Yom had been correct. One could have a fancy for another woman. But before he spoke to her of his decision, Laida said, "Bunny Gandle, you will stay with me in my house tonight."

He nodded and answered, "That I wish. Very soon I should have told you."

She laughed and said, "I am glad we are of a mind, but it is well that I am the first to speak, for it is my house. No fair stranger should need to ask of me for hospitality."

And, reaching across the table, she touched his hand. For some reason Gandle was displeased in his heart. Yom and Flame and Agatha had always waited for his word and for his gesture. None in the crowd had dared to touch Kla so, and he was the conqueror of that dead god.

He wanted to say, as he had done earlier in the day, "My name is Bunny Gandle, and I am a god."

Something stopped him. He had a foreboding she might laugh. Once she had done that. Agatha did not laugh.

Many times he drank from the jug of wine and when, at length, his thoughts found voice and he told her that he was a god she did not laugh. Instead she pulled the jug from his hand. Angry, he rose to reach for it and she pushed him back.

"It is the time for miracles," she said.

They went up together into darkness and he was not afraid. Upon that, too, he would put his heel. His hand came to her throat and for a moment he felt that this was a combat such as he had fought with the man in armor. He would show strength and conquer.

Something of that he must have said in the night. Much later he lay with his

head upon her lap, as they had been in the cave, and the dizzy weariness which he had known after the downfall of Kla he knew again. And again he sobbed and he clutched her hands.

"There, there," she said, "there, there, my Bunny. Sleep, for the dawn comes."

And she whispered to him, "Would you conquer me again?"

She laughed, then, for within a day she had seen the twilight of two gods.

Half in sleep, he mumbled, "I am a god," and there was kindness in her hand upon his forehead, though her voice denied his words.

"You are Bunny," she told him. "My little rabbit of delight. Sleep. The gods cannot. You are no god. Why bother? No man is."

Down among the gray dreams slept Gandle. He swam in fancy below the surface of the river, where the lamp gleamed

out of reach. Often he tried to capture it and could not. And in that same dream he stood like Kla commanding worship. And his knees sagged and he fell away from godhead.

Laida spoke to him, though she knew he could not hear.

"I am shriven of a fear. There were you walking from nowhere into this land. So a god might come out of the long valley. And there was never joy of one. A god to make me bow. Kla brought close. I am glad you are a man. Stay awhile, little man. You are not more than I."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

GANDLE remained in the house of Laida during the next day and through other days which followed. She never meekened herself before him and often he knew that salt of dissent for which he had longed. At times life was seasoned beyond his taste. And yet Laida made much of him and thought up each day new names by which to call him and this pleased Gandle, for it made him seem a multitude. And people roundabout did him honor. Now, since wine was no longer served to Kla, the farmers brought some share of the grapes which had gone into that tribute and presented them to Gandle. Through a rite which the people of this land followed Gandle became their countryman. Ten of the eldest gathered in the house

of Laida on the night of full moon and with a knife the wisest cut from the top of Gandle's right ear a little flesh. As the blood flowed all kissed him, since now he was a Kadian of Kadia and brother to them all.

The hand of the old man who made him citizen trembled and, in fact, he cut rather more from off the ear than was the custom, but this time Gandle gave no sign of pain as when last he bled. Outcry he knew as something shameful and so he stood tight-lipped and only Laida, who clutched his hand, shared with him the sharpness of the stinging steel.

In the weeks to come Gandle repented not a little that he had been prevailed upon to take on sameness. He gained a scar and lost divinity. Very soon thereafter the gifts of grapes were ended. He was, as the rest, a Kadian and the story of his exploit dwindled. Within a month the

name of Kla came lightly from the lips of all. Men laughed and spoke as if it had been no great thing to drag the big god down from his perch. Children at play in the road mocked each other with shouts of "Kla! Kla! Kla!" Black-feathered birds flying overhead shrilled out a sound not unlike it. It was, maybe, endurable that Laida no longer thought of him as a god, but Gandle fumed that these others should be so wholly calm concerning him.

For two nights he tossed about and then before dawn he took his sword and cap and retraced his steps along the road which had brought him to Kadia. He had left the glass mountain behind him and it drew him as a magnet. In the dark he thought a little of the dangers of the dragons and the giant. For a time he was tempted to return and say farewell to Laida. He had left her sleeping and she knew nothing of his mission. Would death be like the

deepest slumber? Would he live on because Laida remembered him? He thought on it with all his might, but even after thinking he did not know the answer. If Agatha lived only through his thoughts of her she was but dimly in existence.

Still, Yom had spoken of a great shelf upon which goods were stored and there, now, would be Agatha. Someone with the lamp could call her back to another palace. That Gandle did not like. And were there other shelves, he wondered? One where he might lie?

Since thinking led him nowhere, Gandle walked the faster to come at once to this glass mountain. Instead of Yom's great storehouse of the silent, Gandle pictured rather himself returning presently to Kadia. Upon his back he bore the head of the giant, huge and dripping blood throughout the journey from the slash of Gandle's sword. No, there would be

twenty captive princesses to accompany him and between so many the burden of their dead master might easily be distributed.

This would be a killing not soon forgotten like the downfall of Kla. It was scarce dawn when he came to the foot of the steep incline. He looked intently for some red glow of dragons, but there was no sign of fire. Slowly, he began to climb and before he set foot upon the glass he drew the magic cap tight upon his head. By picking his steps he found the climb less arduous than he remembered. The smooth surface was cool underfoot and he reached the summit without meeting any monster. Here at the top he found a castle hardly as large as the palace which had been his own. His invisibility was of no moment, for he entered in at the gate seeing no one set to guard. But once within the court

he heard the sound of a woman's loud weeping.

Tighter Gandle drew his cap and he gripped his sword. More slowly he advanced down a long corridor into a high and barren room. Upon the floor lay the giant and, at first glance, it seemed to Gandle that this was a man some six or seven inches taller than himself. Over the body there leaned a woman and it was her cries which had come to Gandle in the court. Softly walked Gandle, and the big man stirred not at all. Deep was his sleep if this wailing could not rouse him and so Gandle had no fear to speak out of his invisibility close to the elbow of the woman who made the moaning.

"I am Bunny Gandle," he said, "and I have come to slay the monster who holds you captive. I will set you and the others free."

She looked up on the instant of his

words, but, curiously enough, she did not start, as Gandle had thought, thus to hear a close voice rising up beside her out of empty air.

"Go away," she said. "Go away. I know neither you nor your manner. I am blind. Stand away. Leave me."

And as she turned from where the mighty giant lay, Gandle perceived in the dim light that she was very old and that her face was fretted with wrinkles.

"I have come to kill the monster," said Gandle, "and to free the captives."

"Here is no monster," she answered. "Fo Fum is dead. Throughout a day and a night. Do you mean the dragons? They ran away to the woods quick enough when they heard that he could roar no more. Trust them to turn brave as soon as there was no one around to switch them."

"Is this Fo Fum?" asked Gandle.

She nodded.

"And what brave knight has killed him?"

"None has killed him. He died as I should die, from age and weariness."

Coming closer, Gandle perceived that the big man upon the floor was older than the princess.

"You are a princess and a captive?" he inquired.

The sound she made was almost a laugh.

"Princess, yes," she answered. "Hereabouts we are all so. There's not a cow in this countryside but has a princess come each morning to the milking. Captive——"

Here she paused and wept again.

"It's so long. It's so long. I don't remember."

"The others?" prompted Gandle. "The nineteen others?"

Up sprang the princess and reached for the face of Gandle in the direction from

which the sound of his voice had come to her. He had scarcely time to leap aside from the cutting edge of her skinny hand.

"It was not true," she screamed. "Not nineteen, nor nine, nor any other. If I had dragons still to call I would turn them on you, but there is a dog. A cur will suit to send you yelping."

"Rance!" she called. "Come, Rance."

Gandle started to edge away for he feared that his cap of invisibility might be no protection against the sharp scent of a dog. His panic was unworthy for Rance, who started up from a far corner, was a red dog turned to gray and he, too, was old. Slowly he came across the room and nozzled his head against the hand of the princess. Then he howled as if he knew full well his master was dead. The princess dropped on her knees beside the dog and joined with him in sorrow. They were so when Gandle left the castle. And, for

no reason which he could explain, he pulled the magic cap from off his head as he walked past the body of the giant.

By dint of some running he was back to the house of Laida while the morning was still young. She stirred in her sleep and woke as Gandle came through the door.

"Are you going out?" she called sleepily, and Gandle accepted her misapprehension.

"I will walk to the cave," he said, "where once I overthrew the mighty Kla."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SUMMER turned to Winter and discontent grew in Gandle. "Fetch me this?" Laida would say and Gandle fetched and grumbled. Many times he longed for the lamp and he told her of the might and power which had been his and of Agatha. And thereupon she spoke in return of other men journeying the road who had stopped long days or short ones in her house. All these Gandle hated and he mentioned then, and many times thereafter, the great beauty which had blazed in Agatha. For now his memory brought Agatha far more often into life. What if she were not by his side at such times as he turned his head? She was ready to his desire and gone when he had no need of her. No longer did he think of it as calamity that a portion of his life with her was solitary. As he sat

thus and mused Laida called to him across the room, "Fetch her. Swim for your lamp and bring her back."

"When the ice melts I will," said Gandle, but it was still Winter when he spoke.

At times when her tongue was sharp Gandle would make no answer and, before she could reply, slip on his magic cap of invisibility and steal away to the farthest room. There from behind closed doors he heard only the babble of her anger. But she did not leave this trick with him for long, for at last she seized upon the cap as it lay beyond his reach and tossed it into the fire. The magic fabric burned like cotton and was gone.

Not all their life was so. Often she was gentle and they sat before the logs many an hour, shoulders touching, silent. She sang to him a little in a voice low and husky. These songs of Kadia were sad

and most of them were of King Helgas who came from across the mountains to ravage the fields and burn and pillage. And Gandle learned to hate this Helgas and now, instead of dragons and the dark, he feared the king. At night he heard the trumpets of the army and the tramp of invading elephants. Often he dreamed of the emperor and in all these dreams he ran from Helgas, with heart pounding as when he ran from the house of Baoz.

Winter broke and on a night of heavy mist Laida said to him before they slept, "Soon the ice will melt."

"Not yet," said Gandle, "not yet," and held her close.

In the dream it was the heavy feet of elephants which he heard. Louder, louder till he woke and there was the harsh sound of knocking on the door.

"Who's there?" cried Laida and a frightened voice called out, "The armies of

King Helgas march. They will be here before the morning."

The heart of Gandle did not pound now that his dream had come true.

"I shall see him sooner," he said, and rose to take his sword.

Laida clung about his neck and would not leave him free until he was out the door. He kissed her close and then he ran up the road. Her voice in farewell followed him.

"Come back," she cried, "come back with your sword or without it."

Gandle knew which way he must travel to meet the armies of Helgas. Always, they had come through the purple mountains which lay to the East. In Kadia there was no king nor any ruling power, but in times of stress the people round about would gather in the passes and here a few might hold off many.

All this Gandle had learned from the

songs and stories of Laida and so he ran to gain the crest of the hills before the elephants should have put the steep ascent behind them. It is hard to beat off an elephant when he charges down at you from a height.

Pounding ahead, Gandle came abreast of another runner, a man named Jason, and soon they overtook a third who was called Malchus. These three ran on together in the dark and at dawn they came to the tightest pass in the mountains. Here there was a hut and they rested, for from this point they could see all the land about and the road turning and twisting up from the green plains. So narrow was the notch that elephants must come at them two by two. At a great distance smoke seemed to huddle above the road and this might be the flying dust of marchers.

Soon, after the sun was up, the sound of a horn was faintly heard and they knew

for certain Helgas was approaching. The alarm in Kadia must have been belated for no others came to join the three defenders. They talked together in whispers as if the soldiers of the far-off army might overhear. It was of death they spoke, and Jason thought to die was all and final. When they asked Gandle he answered that as yet he did not know. Malchus had heard of those who returned.

"My father knew of such a one," he told them. "It was my father who came to capture him and there was a soldier of the god who drew a sword and cut the ear from off my father's head. And this strange man said then that none should raise weapons in his defense. He touched the ear of my father and it was whole. Not so much as the mark of the steel did he bear in later life for all this happened while I was still a child. But my father said that they took this man and he was

whipped and nailed to a cross and killed upon it and that in all this time he made no move to stop anyone who injured him, but rather blessed them and forgave."

"Whipped?" said Gandle.

"Yes," said Malchus," and cut with spears and never once did he fight back."

"They did all this to him and he endured and made no move to save himself?" asked Gandle.

"So my father told me," answered Malchus.

"Let's hope the story is not true," said Gandle and took up his sword, for now the clamor of the horns was loud and grew each minute fiercer.

"But it must be true," insisted Malchus. "He was a god. That we know. Into a tomb they laid him and upon a morning he rose up and stood out under the sun and he cried aloud for all to hear, 'I am still here.' "

And now there came trumpeting which was not of horns, the elephants of Helgas complaining because the way was steep. Malchus, Gandle and Jason had all seen dragons in their day and Jason, as a boy, had killed one. Compared to such, an elephant is puny but he is more strange. Jason in a corner trembled.

"We can still go back the way we came," he said.

Gandle and Malchus both were silent and gave thought to this counsel.

"What can we do?" said Jason. "We are three against the thousands. It is no use. We have no chance."

Out of the whispering, the voice of Gandle rose high and to himself strange in tone and words.

"It is no use," he cried. "We have no chance. Let's go and fight them in the pass."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THROUGH the door strode Gandle and down the mountain and away ran the others. He stood alone and waited for the host and he was joyful. Now he could see the elephants which came the first of all and behind them many soldiers, dark-skinned, in green coats. They sang as they climbed up the hill toward Gandle. Above their heads whipped red flags brisk in the breeze. Upon a horse was one who wore a golden crown and at him Gandle threw a stone, but the rider never knew of that, for he was still a mile away.

Gandle waved his sword above his head and danced from side to side in the narrow road, for he was eager that there should be someone before him at whom he might slash. Closer drew the host of Helgas and fiercer was the sword play of Gandle. Now

they had sighted him. Arrows flew above his head. And more. With the next flight one cut through the flesh of his leg. Gandle dropped upon a knee and the sword fell from his hands. He was sick with the pain of it. Halfway he turned toward the path down which Malchus and Jason had fled, but, as he turned, the hurt was worse than before and again he wheeled to face the armies of King Helgas. A spear broke close to him against a rock. Another arrow drew blood from his cheek. His cry was drowned in the loud roar of the approaching army. Slowly, surely the elephants came toward him. A numbness was in him so that he could no longer shout or raise the sword.

"Oh, god who would not fight," he said, "help me to fight. I am still here."

And now he had his sword again and straight he stood and blocked the pass to Helgas.

The archers and the spearsmen ceased from firing for in a moment now Gandle would be down under the feet of the elephants.

"If only I had the lamp," he thought, "I could raise up armies and elephants against them."

With his right hand he reached out for the place at his belt where once it hung. There was nothing. In the fierceness of his longing his eyes narrowed. Between him and the big gray beasts up rose a mist. His thoughts swam deep into those pools from out of which he had molded Agatha for his purposes. The shape of the lamp he remembered. The shine of it and the cool touch of its surface. And in the air he rubbed his hand against the dim brass bowl which hung suspended in the dust before his eyes.

"Yom," he shrieked, "I have a lamp."

High up before him, slowly blotting out

sun, dust and vision of the lamp rose the head and shoulders of the first of all the elephants.

Weeping, screaming, tears in his eyes and throat, Gandle's voice broke upon one last cry.

"Yom, I have no lamp. Save me."

Racked with fear and pain Gandle fell to the road and his sword clattered against the rocks. Across his body Yom thrust out a hand and with thumb and forefinger flicked the near elephant in the forehead. Death came too quick for the animal to be warned or give warning and two soldiers were crushed as the big beast fell all of a heap. The second elephant had kept tight hold upon the tail of the leader for it is so they march, preserving fellowship. Having no one to follow, he backed away, crowding spearsmen from off the edge of the road and down the precipice. As the sharp points annoyed his hide, he lashed

out and killed a field marshal. Just once Yom filled his cheeks and blew upon the frightened troops. Many in that division died and all the rest of the armies turned and ran away.

"There! there!" said Yom to Gandle, unconscious in the road, and then went home.

Many hours later, Gandle stirred and blinked and half rolled over. His foot touched the trunk of the dead elephant and he leaped to his feet though it was agony. All down the pass before him were the dead men. Nicked and bent by the rock against which it fell lay the sword of Gandle. He picked it up, wondering, for he remembered nothing more than the head and shoulders of the big elephant which had come so close when he blocked the pass to Helgas. Blinking, aching, puzzled, Gandle looked again at the blotches on his sword and the devastation round about. "They must have made me mad," he said.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

GANDLE found that after whipping an army it is hard to go straight home and so he lingered in the pass. In packs upon the back of the dead elephant was ample food and in all truth Gandle was still too bruised and bloody to make the steep descent toward Kadia. Yet, when he did move on it was forward. He followed the road which led to that side of the mountains which he had never seen and limped to the unknown.

Not all of it was interesting. Helgas, fleeing from the hills, had burned and ravaged in his anger. But Gandle bore this barren country with fair spirits, for since the battle he had more pride in himself and was better company. Still, it was with joy he came at last to the head of a tremen-

dous valley in which lay many houses and green fields. Spring had broken forth. The road into this valley cut off sharply from the main highway which Gandle traveled and at the fork sat one who said, "Forbear."

"Why should I pause?" asked Gandle civilly, for this was an old man who spoke and he had no need to overawe him.

"It is called the Land of the Flying Sword," explained the ancient. "Once we knew it as Sabala, which means a place of sunlight, but that was before Death made it his sporting field."

"Is Death but new in the Valley?" Gandle inquired.

"No, not that," said the old man, "but in other days he was slow footed. Seventy years I lived in Sabala. I saw many die. But it was decent. The march was as that of Spring and Summer. Gray hair came. Then white. There was a touch of a finger-

tip before the whole hand fell. Those who were to go could prepare and leave all things in order. Often there would be a year, or more, of mist before the blackness."

"And is it so different now?"

"Yes, for half a year Death has been without patience. Look deep into the valley and see the tall, straight cliffs. From over those high edges great rocks fall. A husband leaves his wife and, as he walks to till a field, there is the quick and silent flight of doom. Upon an instant that man lies crushed and dead beside a ditch."

"And, so, have many gone?"

"It is not numbers, but the quickness of it. We are willing to die. Against that we make no complaint. But this should come with a shaking and a fever and priests and wise men grouped about the bed. He has no right, this Death, to joggle the elbow of a man as he sits at

wine and strike him down with a cup half full."

"But not more have died?"

"All that I tell you. It is the haste. One cannot say in Sabala, 'On the morrow I will do so' for on that morning he may be no more. Stories freeze upon the lips of tellers for they fear that they may not come to the end of the tale."

"Death has given you time to spin a story," said Gandle. "You have told me that it is now seventy years since you began life in Sabala."

"And I will not end it there," answered the old man sharply. "I have crawled out here beyond the edge of the accursed valley. It is here my grandsons bring me food. Cheerfully enough will I die when my time comes, but I will not endure to have my life spilled so clumsily. It is good wine and the last drops must be poured more slowly than any in the cask."

"You have told me much," said Gandle, "but there is in me an eagerness to know all this myself. Already I have seen arrows fly and spears and now it suits me to watch for this flying sword."

"That," said the old man tartly, "is but a name. I have said to you destruction came from rocks."

"Even so," replied Gandle. "If Death is a mind to gulp the wine of my body let him drink deep and fast and choke upon it."

And with these words he left the man who gave him warning and walked to the head of the valley where the road ended against the wall of a high cliff which rose sheer toward the sky.

For many weeks Gandle remained in the house of a man and his two sons. He was welcome for his spirits were gay under the ripening sun of summer. And he had green emeralds from the packs of Helgas.

At night he tossed and did not sleep and he thought it was perhaps on account of the story of the flying sword. But Death came to none in all this time. Nor did it seem to Gandle that everyone in the valley took the doom of suddenness so harshly as the old man who lay outside the valley. Despite the words of the exile, Gandle saw wine drunk and heard stories begun and ended. And some were long and once or twice Gandle gazed almost hopefully toward the sky to see if there were truth in the warnings which had been given to him.

Then, of a hot and dusty morning, Gandle heard cries and scurrying outside the door. He woke to the sound of sobs and screaming and into the house was carried the body of the eldest son crushed by the weight of a missile from the sky. Later, Gandle, with others, looked upon the rock which was pure white save for the dark

stains upon it. So heavy was it that not even Tubal, mightiest of all in the valley, could stir this stone which Death had tossed.

That night Gandle climbed the cliff which lay behind the house. Here was a ledge and there a root and up he pulled himself for he could not lie quiet, now that he knew some part of the truth the old man had told him. Up toward the stars he went. And all about him there was wind which might have been the sound of wings, but even when he reached the top he never saw Death's Angel. It was only the voice which was ever known to him.

"Go back," said the voice, a low sweet voice, "your name has not yet come to me."

This heartened Gandle and he held his ground and said, "Why do you toss these pebbles upon the people of Sabala?"

"It is the will of God," replied the voice.

For minutes Gandle waited to gather courage for his next query. Twice he reassured himself with the thought, "My name has not yet come to him." And he added, " I'll not be fool enough to blurt it out where he can hear."

"Who is God?" asked Gandle.

"His name is Yom," answered the voice.

So great was the surprise and shock of this that Gandle spoke aloud and said, "I've argued with him."

"And would you now," crashed out a deeper voice, which was familiar.

"First tell me are you God," said Gandle.

Yom spoke, but to Death's Angel.

"Slay me tonight," he said, "the old man Sisera who sleeps beside the high road. Enough have died for now within this valley. And hold; he wishes death but slowly. Crush not his head but break his back. We'll see how he likes that."

Away into the darkness fluttered wings and Yom replied, "I am not God. For a while I thought so."

Gandle breathed easier and grew more aggressive.

"When I lost the lamp you said you would sit at home and cook poached eggs and eat them."

"It bored me."

"But that was better than scattering death about on sleeping men."

"Oh, no," said Yom. "It was this kindly service of bringing death which first moved me to play at being God. I may as well admit I tried. And I was almost."

"But how," persisted Gandle, "are you kind in killing?"

"I learned of that in the days when the lamp was passed from hand to hand. During thousands of years it was within the power of hundreds to require of me anything they wished if only they framed that

wish in words. Not one of all that number ever asked for death and, oh, so many wanted it. That was my tragedy as slave of the lamp. I am not hard and I was compelled to flit about putting fire into the hands of children and letting fools blunder into bruises because they were not wise enough to lift into their voices the things out of their hearts. I remember there was a lad for whom I fetched a girl, a palace and a son."

"I wanted them."

"So you said. A birch-bark boy."

At this Gandle blushed and said, "Concerning that business I have since informed myself in moving through the world."

"Earlier you might have known if you had listened to me. But you were no different save in minor matters from the others. All asked for wishes chosen out of notions which bobbed about in shallow places of the mind. None fished deep. After I had

rested for some days I had a longing to travel and to bring to men things they truly wanted and could not put in word or thought. You should know. There was that tired boy in the valley whom I lifted out of toil and the burning sun into cool shadows. And tonight I shall ease the gnawing fear which eats at the heart of the old man who babbled to you beside the road."

"But these are things for God," said Gandle stiffly.

"He suffers volunteers," replied Yom. "And how could I tell in the beginning I was not God? I found I could save and slay and move a mountain. Once I checked a marching army with my thumb and forefinger."

"Oh, well," interrupted Gandle, "I've done that too, but I did have to use all the strength of my arms and shoulders. I had a sword."

"Yes," chuckled Yom, "and I've heard that once you thought you were a god."

"But only one," remonstrated Gandle.

"Perhaps, there are no more."

"But what made you sure you were not God?" persisted Gandle. "Have you seen Him or heard Him?"

"No, that couldn't make me sure. I didn't see Him, that was it. When I flew to a mountain top it always seemed to me that Someone had just quit that place before I came. Always just ahead of me was this Other. I might look over an ocean, up to the skies, down to the depths and see only stars and men and fishes. The One I sought was not there. He had been. I can dream of a Being mightier and more magnificent than Yom and what I dream I can make and mold. If there was no God I could create Him."

"Why don't you?" said Gandle eagerly. "Let me wait and watch and help maybe."

"If we fashioned him," and again there was a chuckle in Yom's voice, "it would only be to set a new mark which, with a second effort, we might excel. To such a task there is no end."

"I do not quite understand."

"This may be simpler," Yom continued. "When I set out as free to ride on life and turn and rein it, I made one rule for myself and called it absolute. Since so much had been granted those who held the lamp and wished, I decided that in all justice I must never come to aid anyone who asked my help. I would give of my strength only to those who asked nothing. So it must be with God. When prayer is made and answered something is taken away from the glory of God. The man who prays to God seeks to belittle Him. He dares to jog the elbow of his God. He says, 'This I have begun, now let God finish it.' When

I lived under the obligation of the lamp I heeded those who called and came to them. A prayer is only another name for a wish and as a genie I answered all who prayed, possessing faith. And I say that faith is a trick, cheaply learned. All who had the lamp learned faith. Why wouldn't they? When did it fail them?"

Gandle remembered his wish for love but said nothing, for Yom's mood was too earnest to encourage opposition.

"Now all that I have said," continued Yom, "sounds wise and truthful to me. The rule I set for myself was a good rule. I didn't follow it. I broke it. Not always. Only three times I think. But once is enough to split a rule wide open. And each time, well, all but once, I fought to keep my rule. It was as if the spell of the lamp was on me. And there is no lamp. It lies snug at the bottom of the river.

And yet I had to go. Who could have made Yom, free genie, do that?"

"Maybe you're softer than you think," suggested Gandle.

"I am not soft; I'm kind. That's better. Well, I'm not always kind. That old man Sisera will suffer, but he's a fool and folly should be punished. There can't be kindness unless there's harshness too. That's another rule I've made for myself—to be mean just often enough to make mercy welcome.

"And while we're talking," boomed on Yom, "and since we are alone, as much alone as is possible in this world where something vast flits always out of reach, I don't mind telling you that my way is the right one. It's a mistake for God to answer prayers, but what can I do? He's bigger. If I could only argue with Him, as I've done with you! You know it's just

possible He might come round to my way of thinking. Sometimes, I doubt if He has pride. He should. I'm less, I'm admitting that, and I have pride."

In all this theology Gandle found his own fortunes somewhat slighted and when Yom paused, to rest for a moment upon his pride, Gandle asked, "And will you kill me here in the valley?"

"Not in the valley," said Yom. "As yet you have not lived a circle. You have in your heart a wish and a longing still unserved. It will come up."

"And what is it?"

"No need to say. Before noon tomorrow you will have begun to follow it."

There came the sound of wings and a frightened voice calling, "Yom! Yom!"

"Here am I," said the genie.

"The old man Sisera," whispered Death's Angel, flying close, "when I came

to break his back I found him dead already in his sleep beside the road."

"Overruled," said Yom bitterly and he was still brooding when Gandle climbed down the cliff and back into the Valley of Sabala.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

GANDLE turned toward Kadia in the morning. It was not a decision to which he gave thought or argument. The thing seemed natural. He was drawn. This must be the inner inclination of which Yom had spoken. And it seemed to Gandle, homeward bound, that he had been gone only a little while. It was, he knew, some seven months since he left the house of Laida, but he never doubted that he would find her as when he went away. He had seen a Spring and Summer without her, faced down an army, lived in the Valley of the Flying Sword and heard the voice of Death's Angel. There would be much to talk about and she should be eager for his adventures.

By now his wounds were healed and

even his limp twinged only infrequently to remind him of the battle in the pass. Though the rest had fled, it must be known that he was the saviour of the country. This they would not forget as they had forgotten his victory over Kla. And in his pocket he carried proofs of prowess, for green emeralds out of the pack train of Helgas clinked as he proceeded.

This was a faster journey than his going. He slept in fields and walked with sun and moon. Now the air was sharper and so was Gandlé. At times he ran. Autumn was upon him before he reached the Purple Mountains. Spring had come and Summer and he had not swum for his lamp. Yes, Agatha was beautiful but he would rather tell his tales to Laida. Another year would do to fetch the metal from off the river bottom. He and Yom alone knew of the spot where last the lamp was seen before the waters drowned it. It was by the rock

at the point where the tipmost shadow of the big oak fell. And while the lamp lay in the weeds no other could call Agatha to him for his pleasure. There in the great storehouse beside the unborn palaces and fountains she rested waiting for the word of Gandle. And, as he moved his hand across the lamp, just so, decidedly and fierce, a tug would come upon the heels of Yom withholding death and loosing it above the Valley of Sabala.

"He'll think it's God who's called him and he'll find it's Gandle."

Gandle chuckled at the vision of surprise upon the huge face of the genie.

"And I could be a little mean and say, 'Now let me see you fetch for me poached eggs.' "

But these joys could wait, for most of all he thought of Laida. When he came to the notch in the mountains he found white bones, large and small, upon the roadway.

And just beyond the pass it was possible to look down at the plain which was Kadia. Beyond the small dark patch of green, at closer hand a forest, stood the little house to which he had come that day so long ago when he ached with the weariness of killing Kla. All the way down the slope Gandle ran. He was breathless at her door and leaned a moment before he threw it open. She slept, but roused at his step and her first words were, "You ran."

"All the way home," said Gandle.

"It was a long course," she answered, "and I have been alone."

"Not now," said Gandle.

"Yes, now. And, as it seems, always. Set apart. Branded. Monstrous. Of course you ran. You were afraid. Why not? Even I am afraid, but I cannot run to any place of safety."

"Afraid," said Gandle angrily. "I turned back Helgas. Twice they wounded

me. For a week I bled. See, I still limp," and he hitched across the floor rather more awkwardly then when he ran down from the mountains.

"Go back," said Laida, checking him with her right hand, "I do not want you close."

"I was not afraid," urged Gandle, puzzled still. "For weeks I walked the Valley of the Flying Sword, having Death at my elbow."

"Death at your elbow," cried Laida in a fury. "Try months with life under your ribs and belly. Die! You could die. What of it? Your work's done. You're not needed. You might be in the mountains brandishing your sword. Dead, sleeping, drunk, laughing, holding a woman close. What is this thing to you? In the beginning it was of us both, but now I am left alone to wait. How long did you wait for Helgas? It was not so long."

"I do not understand," interrupted Gandle.

"Then know," she said. "Come close and look upon your woman with your child."

He saw her body in a blur, for there leaped into his mind the sight of Agatha as she was on the night when first conjured. Perhaps he faltered in his step and Laida beat at him with her hands and said, "Now that you have looked go on. Run your long course again before you return."

"I tell you go," she said and Gandle backed away from her fury and out the door. The sun had swept the sharpness from the air and he remembered the river and went back along the road down which he first came to Kadia.

And he said to himself, "It was not Laida of whom Yom spoke when he said that I had within my heart an urge to follow."

He could think only of the slimness of Agatha and yet he was not merry on this journey to the river. "She would not have me stay," he said, and now it was of Laida whom he thought. "I was not afraid. Why should I be afraid of the coming of my son? 'In ugliness and agony' that was what Yom told me long ago. He said it was better. I do not know. She will not have me with her."

In part he felt that he had done a wrong, but pride edged into his guilt. Once she had laughed at him and now she wept.

When night fell he thought most of Agatha. Perhaps the memory of her had not been away from him. Yom said that men never knew what they truly wanted. He was going back along an old road, there could be newness and discovery in returning. After all he could not travel always into the unknown, for at last he would come to the edge of the world and

topple over upon the turtle's back. Birds flew away and came home again. He might ask from Yom the self-same palace. It was larger than the house of Laida. Now her hair did not shine with the fire which was on it in the cave of Kla.

But first he must find the lamp. Many times in the days which followed he said, "Here is the river." To find a river was no trick at all. Nor were great oaks uncommon. Often he dived into swift streams and came up with water in his eyes and muddy fingers. So thick were the grasses in the fields upon the river bed that a little thing like a lamp might lie hidden in the tangle for centuries. And then, on a day, he saw an oak and knew it for his own. Here was the very spot at which he hurled his lamp at Yom and missed him. By now diving was cold business, but the memory of Agatha warmed

the blood of Gandle. Did Laida think he would stray solitary through the world because she herself had grown angry and ugly and cast him off?

Down under the water went Gandle several times and saw nothing. And, then, as he pressed through the green darkness after many tries there was something within the range of his arm which was yellow. He seized upon it and in the light when he emerged he found his hand closed upon a true fragment of the very lamp. In search of the remaining metal he made excursions to the river bed, but all in vain. There was no more.

Cold and shivering, he sat at sundown and examined this little broken piece of brass. Without design his hand swept across its surface and, as he did so, a cloud of mist floated fast over the river, taking shape as it flew. Out of the air, like a

kitten dropping to a velvet rug, a genie leaped to earth and stood before Gandle. This genie reached scarce to the waist of Gandle.

"But you are not Yom," said Gandle in surprise.

"My name is Rif, master," replied the midget genie.

"And are you the slave of this little lamp and under thrall to carry out the commands of him who holds it?"

"Yes, master, to the limit of my strength I must obey."

"Oh, that," said Gandle rudely. "It is not the lamp it used to be."

"No, master," answered Rif, "it has grown smaller."

"What I mean," said Gandle, "is that I could no longer ask for palaces and have them."

"How large a palace?" inquired Rif somewhat anxiously.

"As high as my head and long enough for one, perhaps two, to lie full length."

"That I could do," said Rif relieved. "This is the way of the fragment of the lamp, master. It is but a fragment and in the wearing down all power of great wishes has departed. I am the slave of whims. Fancies, small desires, the yearning of a moment, all such I can grant and gratify."

"My purpose is larger," complained Gandle disappointed. "It was my plan to call back to me a woman whom I knew, the fairest lady in all the land. I left her because she was not always real. And that was very foolish, since for that reason she was always beautiful and never ugly, never angry."

"Her name, master?" said Rif.

"I have gone halfway around the earth fighting, braving death," continued Gandle heedless of the interruption, "on my jour-

ney back to her. Once I routed a great army for her sake and on this very afternoon I have caught a cold in searching after Agatha."

"Agatha?" said Rif.

"It is her name," conceded Gandle.

"But that I can do," panted the little genie dancing up and down in the exuberance of his competence. "Agatha, oh yes, oh yes, indeed. That is quite simple. I will return upon the instant."

Gandle's sudden loud cry caught Rif half in misty outline as he began to fade upon the progress of his mission.

"Stay," and the genie returned to stand at Gandle's elbow.

"You said it was within your might to grant only fancies and small desires?"

Rif rapped his head three times upon the earth in apology for the imperfection of his powers.

"My master speaks truly."

"And suppose I tell you that my heart bleeds for this and that it is a mighty wish, would you still speak up so pertly and offer to bring me Agatha?"

"As long as you hold the lamp I am the slave of your whims," responded Rif.

"A whim?" growled Gandle.

"A whim," answered the genie very firmly for a man of his size.

"Then," said Gandle bleakly, "let Agatha sleep on. Bring me hot food in a bowl."

Gandle noticed that Rif, because of his slightness, could transform himself into mist even more rapidly than Yom, but he was slower in execution. Apparently wishes come faster than whims. Gandle sneezed twice and looked at the lamp accusingly. "My sword is better," he said angrily. "Why bother with a lamp? I can carve my own whims," and he took the

shrunken lamp and crushed it to small metal splinters under his heel. These scraps he threw into the river. And so the spell was broken. Rif never did come back.

CHAPTER TWENTY

WEARILY, Gandle returned through weather which grew bitter. He had bruised himself in a search for something which did not matter. "Run your course again," Laida had told him. Well, that was done with. She would not grudge him now a place beside the fire and a roof for Winter. All the way to her house he thought of what he should say. He traveled under gray skies. Trees drooped. No longer did he clink with emeralds and adventure. There was no eagerness in him to tell this last story of the lamp. The best would be to enter silently and sit in the farthest corner to which warmth came. She had needed him and in that time he took his strength far off across the mountains.

Brittle leaves broke under his feet as he

came slowly up the path to the well-remembered door. Maybe she would need him still. Would she be there? He looked before he entered. All the many longer speeches which had run through his mind faded.

"I am sorry," he said to the woman on the bed, and when she did not answer he added, "I am here to help."

She looked toward him and he knew that the fierceness was gone from her.

"Hold up your son," she said.

She put his boy into his arms and Gandle raised him up. Much of the fury that had been Laida's was in this tiny one who wrinkled a red face and looked upon his father with puzzled protest. And almost immediately he yelled at the sight of him. This was not a child with whom to frolic, but neither was there any sign of the submission which Gandle had found so deadening in a previous paternity. Seemingly,

apologies must be made to him and Gandle, passionate to please, put emeralds into each palsied fist. The child squeezed hard upon these green stones and smiled. As the wrinkles smoothed, the eyes came out and, gazing down, Gandle saw himself as in a tiny pool which dwarfed him. Now the world had two Gandles. Excited he cried out, "His name is Bunny Gandle."

Laida laughed and said, "But see, his hair is red."

"I do not mind," said Gandle.

"From you he came and now you want him back," she answered and still she laughed a little.

"The nose that might be mine," went on Gandle unheeding and he thrust his hand against the chest of the child.

"Some time he shall go with me to the pass when armies come and watch how I drive them back and learn the way of it."

"And when he walks," continued Gan-

dle, "I'll go with him and point out the better road and guard him against dragons."

"As Baoz would have walked with you," objected Laida, for she knew that story.

"He will grow strong enough to swing my sword and carry it."

Gandle offered the hilt to the child, but the baby cried and would not clutch.

"All this may be," said Laida, "but I am still his need," and she nursed the son of Gandle.

Her hand met Gandle's and he said, "The lamp I swam for is gone and broken. I had it back and gave it up for there was nothing from it that I wanted."

"And does that make you sad?"

"No, not so sad."

The child, intent upon other matters, dropped the emeralds and Gandle picked them up and put them into the hands of Laida.

"These I brought for you because—because I was away so long."

"They shine," she said and he remembered her eyes the first day he saw them.

"It does not matter now whether the ice melts," Gandle told her.

"I never thought it would," answered Laida.

"Can I stay?"

She nodded.

And Gandle wondered just what was the thing for which he had been seeking, for it was in his heart that now he would sit just as he sat, close, touching the hand of Laida. Here there was more comfort than in the Valley of the Flying Sword or upon the side of the Glass Mountain. Down dropped his eyelids in the warmth. Pine branches in the fire made a pleasantness. Wind from far behind the mountains played upon the dead leaves outside the door. The sound was musical. It was a

song, an old song that he knew. All of it had been around a word which came in every chorus. In great amazement Gandle opened his eyes and looked at the red-haired woman. In peace and broad daylight he had found Elaine and Vanetal and Cinafar. This was love which he had demanded from Yom. His search had stopped beside a fire.

He touched the arm and shoulder of Laida and told her of his discovery.

"For a long time I have loved you."

"I know it began that morning in the cave," she replied.

"Yes, that was it. When you ran through the dark up to me and we were together."

And Gandle sighed in great content and said, "I like it."

Across the leaves the footsteps of a runner crackled and at the door a hand knocked and a voice cried out, "The armies of King Helgas march."

Very slowly, Gandle rose and reached for his sword. Danger had come a second time as if it were a season.

"You did come back," Laida whispered softly.

Gandle told her, "This time I will not even wait to bleed. I'll bring you emeralds."

He looked at Gandle. "It is too soon for him to watch and learn," he said. "Another time."

His feet dragged as he ran toward the pass. He was trying to think and it slowed his steps. Just how was it that he had done this thing before? He could not remember. Why should anything in life be twice? And had he now been round the circle of which Yom spoke? It almost seemed as if there were two of him running within a single body. There was the Gandle who felt and the Gandle who

thought and remembered. He had come to the end of impulse.

But he must reach the notch in time and outwit the elephants. Panting, he came to that narrow place and already the invaders swarmed. It was an arrow at close range which thrust against his heart. The soldiers tossed him to one side so that no passing elephant might slip and stumble. There was sun upon the mountains for all but Gandle, but in his darkness he breathed and a priest from the passing ranks knelt beside him and raised his head.

"I am still here," muttered Gandle, for he remembered that he had left a green sprig upon Laida's breast.

"You will die," said the priest, "and come to a great gate where Peter stands and within those walls——"

Gandle motioned to him to be silent.

"I won't be told," said Bunny Gandle, "I want to know."

THE END

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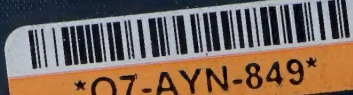
Gandle Follows His Nose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